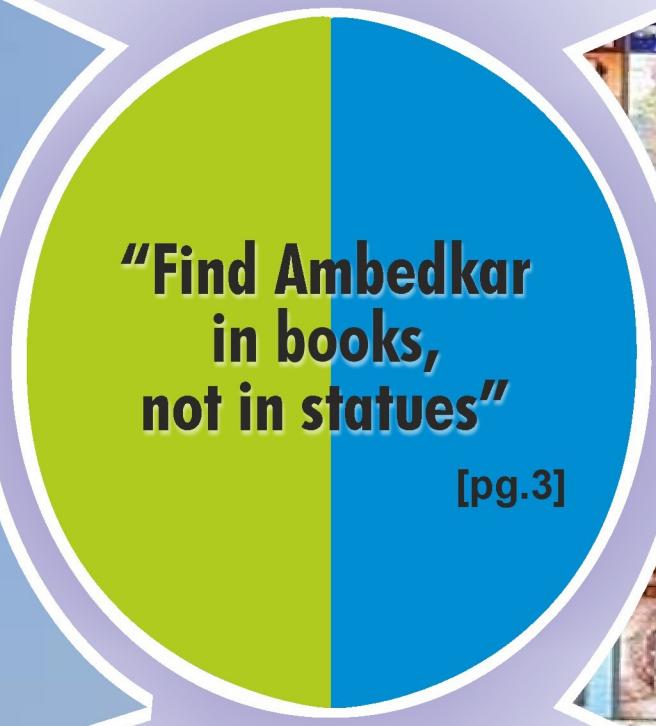


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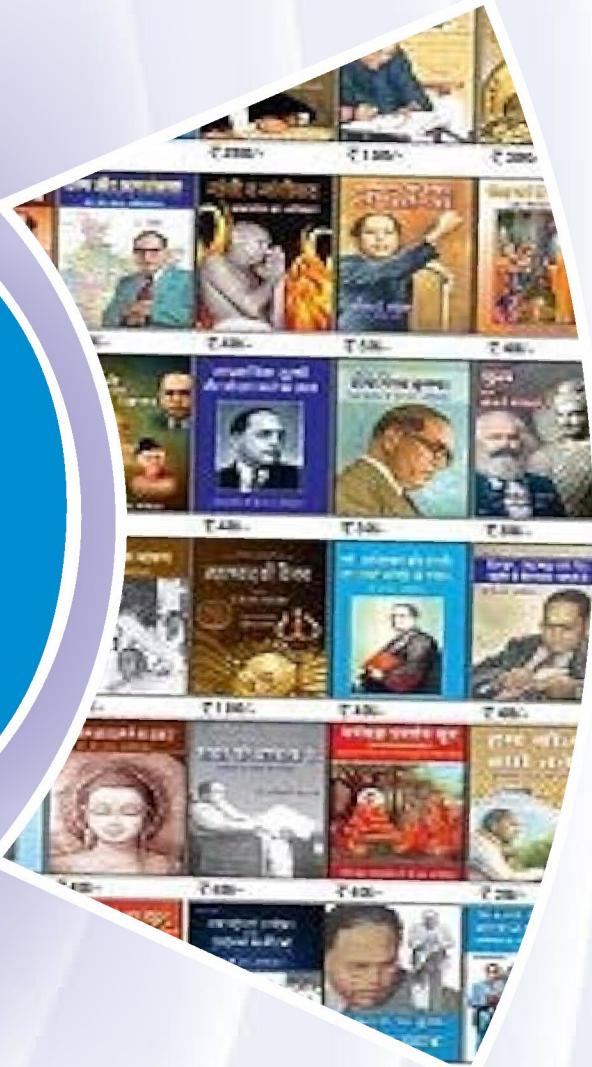
AMBEDKAR VISION

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**“Find Ambedkar
in books,
not in statues”**

[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. South Asia now finds itself at a moral and political crossroads. In India, Bangladesh and Pakistan even in the diaspora, the clouds of social caste, communal and gender oppression is worsening the concept of equality. The recent events, ranging from India's increased persecution of religious minorities and caste-based atrocity to Bangladesh's communal violence and Pakistan's continued forced conversions depicts a continuation of the shared regional space failing to uphold human rights. It means more autocracy, less space in urban environments and less tolerance of dissent and diversity. India is seeing more paradoxes of the world's greatest democracy. Indian Religious Freedom Commission (EFIRLC) and many foreign groups like the Evangelical Fellowship of Human Rights Watch and USCIRF reports highlighted that Christians, Muslims and Dalits are deliberately targeted. In BJP rule, the EFIRLC verified 334 incidents of anti-Christian violence between January and July 2025. A deliberate campaign of intimidation is reflected in misuse of anti-conversion laws, rejection of burial rights and methodical destruction of Sunday worship in states like Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which have concentrated power. The Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) called to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern regarding Human Rights Violations means that the international community has begun to pay attention on what's going on in India. Top authorities from the United Nations, Freedom House and the USCIRF, condemned India's reversal on religious and political freedom in a July briefing to Congress. They stated that repressive regulations like the FCRA and UAPA, hate speech and political policing have silenced activists, NGOs and journalists. Nevertheless, denial and defection are the responses from the Indian government. This silence only serves to strengthen those who spread hate with impunity, as seen by the BJP MP in Maharashtra's savage anti-Christian remarks in which he urged for attacks on missionaries and the destruction of churches. In India's fiercely divided political landscape, the slow legal response to public uproar and protests exposes the selective administration of justice. However, with this enmity, the resilience of the oppressed is shining. For the first time in Nepal, the National Dalit Round Table Conference exemplified the violation, drawing up a 42-point declaration calling for historic atrocities, social justice reforms and recognition of unity among Dalit ranks. Similarly, in Karnataka, Akhil Karnataka Buddhist Dikhhalti Andolana Samiti has urged Dalits to register their religion as Buddhism in the government. Ambedkar's view of social freedom through Buddhist identity. These activities help us see that the fight for equality goes beyond just one reaction. Moral punishment drives this change. Most minorities in South Asia also face similar problems beyond India. Hindu Buddhist Christian Okio Parishad have recorded 258 incidents of communal violence in Bangladesh during the first half of this year. These incidents include rapes, attack on places of worship and attack on Adivasi groups. On the other hand, in Pakistan, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and the Legal Aid Society (LAS) have also highlighted the sufferings of minority women pushed into marriage and conversion. Several earlier investigations documented the complex trauma of kidnapping, forcing and silencing girls in the name of religion. As NCHR Chair Rabia Javari Agha properly noted, this behavior is attacked on the grounds of justice and equality. However, the challenge is beyond policy. This includes eliminating cultural and institutional frameworks that promotes inequality. Caste in India now extends to the digital realm as recent analyses have shown that artificial intelligence systems reproduce caste hierarchies ignoring Ambedkarite content and caste stigma. This "algorithmic casteism" represents the latest front that is discrimination based, data-driven and deeply productive. Unless the algorithm is audited for bias and is fully designed, the technology will only digitize old biases under a modern face. Although there are some signs of progress, as in the US, a historic victory for civil rights came to light, when a district court dismissed a Hindu American Foundation lawsuit that sought to undermine California's caste protections. The court's clear rejection of attempts to equate caste regulation with religious persecution assures that equality before the law cannot be subordinated to identity politics. Similarly, the debate on including caste in anti-discrimination laws has been reopened by the National Secular Society Forum in the UK, reminding the world that casteism is not an "Indian problem" but a global human rights concern. Such stories show, reform cannot depend on courts or commissions alone. It requires moral courage from political leadership, solidarity from civil society and self-awareness within oppressed communities. As Professor Ratan Lal emphasized in his Bhopal address, that the entire human rights struggle including Dalit movement must rediscover its moral and intellectual foundations. Resistance risks becoming symbolic rather than structural without education, research and coalitions. South Asia today faces a difficult choice. It can either continue on the falling path of majoritarian politics, repression and the digital divide or it can rise with the democratic promise enshrined in its constitution. The voices of the downtrodden from Kathmandu to Karachi and Bengaluru to Dhaka demand more than one thing: justice based on truth, equality based on compassion and government based on moralities. History will not forgive our silence. Now is the time to work for South Asian leaders and the world.

AI is learning caste bias in India. Who will audit it for discriminations?

Vaibhav Wankhede

A young recruiter in Bengaluru told me that the algorithm doesn't discriminate. "It just looks at data." I wanted to believe him.

As a content and brand marketer who's embraced tech, I have seen the upside and the ugly. The upside is speed, scope and new forms of storytelling.

But the same tools can quietly reproduce the old biases that my people from marginalised castes already fight every day. In short, the machine promises neutrality, but the data it eats often isn't neutral.

That's not abstract—there's mounting evidence from India and global research that algorithms trained on skewed data can silence, misclassify, misrepresent and financially exclude Dalits at scale. The more I see how these systems operate, the more I worry that AI may not free us from prejudice. It may fossilise it.

We often assume technology is neutral, a clean break from the messiness of human bias. Yet, algorithms are only as fair as the data they are trained on. And in India, that data is soaked in centuries of caste hierarchy. CVs from upper-caste names dominate elite institutions. Dalit and Muslim-majority districts are tagged as "high risk" because poverty is entrenched there.

Content moderation systems, primed by majoritarian sentiment, routinely flag Ambedkarite assertion as "hate speech" while casteist slurs (bhimta, chamar, chandal, ricebag, etc) slip through unchecked. AI is faithfully learning the old prejudices.

Discrimination hiding behind objectivity

Generative AI image/video models trained on massive web datasets frequently reproduce racial and socioeconomic stereotypes. Prompts for "high-paying jobs" produce lighter-skinned, 'upper-caste' looking images; prompts for low-status work produce darker-



skinned figures or visual cues of poverty.

Recent academic work specifically quantifies India-centric biases in image output and shows models equate "Indianness" with higher-caste visual markers while depicting Dalit identities with poverty markers.

It matters for brand creatives, art directors and producers who increasingly use AI tools for mood boards, casting mockups and campaign images.

In practice, this means that a Dalit actor or protagonist often ends up depicted in stereotyped ways in AI mockups used to pitch a series—and brand creatives who rely on them amplify harmful frames without intent.

Recommendation engines power who gets seen on YouTube, Instagram reels, Spotify playlists and even publisher homepages.

If the training signals (likes, comments, reshares) favour mainstream and majoritarian content, Dalit storytelling (nuanced caste critique, oral histories, counter-narratives) struggles to break the "engagement" loop that amplifies content. Investigations of platform dynamics in India show majoritarian patterns persist online and experts warn that algorithmic curation can entrench these patterns.

A Dalit writer's long-form explainer or a producer's short documentary gets poor recommendations, not because of quality, but because the model's engagement priors undervalue its audience or mislabel its tone.

The real danger is not just discrimination, but that it hides behind a facade of objectivity. A recruiter can shrug: the system rejected the candidate. A bank can say: the algorithm flagged the loan.



Responsibility gets outsourced to the machine, while prejudice is quietly legitimised by the authority of mathematics.

This “tech washing” is especially dangerous in India, where digital systems are becoming the backbone of everyday life, e.g., Aadhaar for identity, UPI for payments, predictive analytics for welfare and even policing.

A single biased recruiter may block a few careers; a biased algorithm can exclude millions at once, invisibly.

This is not a distant risk. A neo-Buddhist entrepreneur in Uttar Pradesh may be denied credit because his pin code is flagged as high-risk.

On social media, Dalit voices celebrating BR Ambedkar can be silenced by moderation systems that normalise dominance but punish assertion. Each decision feels technical, but together they map a bleak picture: the future being shaped by machines that think exactly like the casteist society we live in.

What this looks like in my work sphere

- A social media manager who is Dalit finds her Ambedkar-themed campaign repeatedly mass-reported and auto-flagged; reviews take days and the campaign loses momentum, while posts with casteist insults remain visible.
- A junior copywriter with a non-Anglicised name gets fewer interview calls if an employer uses an ATS shortlist; internal audits later show the ATS ranked candidates using signals correlated with past hires.
- A brand marketer runs a CSR film about Dalit dignity; ad delivery optimisers serve the film mostly to urban,

upper-caste segments (higher click-throughs), so the film fails to reach the marginalised communities it intended to engage.

- A producer from a Dalit background is denied fintech credit because the model flags the project's shoot location as “high-risk” due to historical economic indicators, slowing production.

There is a fix and it requires urgency. AI systems must be audited for bias, just as financial accounts are. Datasets must be made more representative, not built solely on histories of exclusion. Companies and governments must be transparent about how algorithms decide who gets jobs, loans or visibility. Citizens must have the right to question those decisions.

Most importantly, Dalit individuals need to be in the rooms where tech is built. Who creates the machine determines whose realities it reflects.

For Dalits, the struggle has always been about fighting invisibility—in classrooms, offices, boardrooms and politics. Now that the battle extends to the hidden world of algorithms.

India stands at a fork: one path leads to a digital future that automates centuries of discrimination; the other to a more inclusive one, where technology finally does what it promises, ie, level the playing field.

The choice is ours. But every time an algorithm silently decides who is employable, trustworthy, or heard, tomorrow's India is already being coded.

I believe in tech; it's the best tool we have to amplify unheard voices, but belief alone isn't enough. If we let convenience and opaque optimisation dictate how creative talent is discovered, represented and funded, we risk building a digital culture that mirrors caste hierarchies.

To avoid that, we must demand transparency, diversify the rooms where models are built and insist that every tool shaping careers, funding and visibility is audited for caste impact. Otherwise, the future is where creativity is curated by biased models.

Source: The Print



**Find Ambedkar
in books,
not in statues”**

**Prof. Ratan Lal asked-
Why don't we have a share
in universities?**

In a seminar organized in Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, Professor Ratan Lal of Delhi University expressed deep concern over the current political and social situation of the Dalit community. He said that getting reservation was the result of a long struggle, but now the society needs to focus on education, research and intellectual discourse and not just dream of electoral power. Professor Ratan Lal was speaking on the topic 'Creation of reserved class, their role in the present' in the provincial executive meeting of Doma Sangh and a discussion. He discussed in detail the historical journey of the Dalit community, the legacy of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, the foundation of reservation and the challenges of the Dalit middle class in the present times. Professor Lal warned the society that rights like education and jobs are being snatched away in rich India and the Dalit society now has to focus on education, research and intellectual discourse instead of only power and electoral politics. He appealed to adopt Ambedkar's practical philosophy and avoid unrealistic dreams. Professor Rattan Lal drew attention to an important historical fact in his address. He said, "Babasaheb Ambedkar used to constantly say that we are a minority in national life. Just like Muslims and Sikhs are minorities, we are also minorities. That is why constitutional safeguards are needed. Have you got reservation on the basis of the demand for minority status or on the claim of being a majority? This is a matter of thinking." He further said that now claiming that 'we will become rulers' is an unrealistic dream. There are only 131 seats in Parliament and limited seats in Vidhan Sabhas, so why is everything being snatched away, this question is not in the discussion.

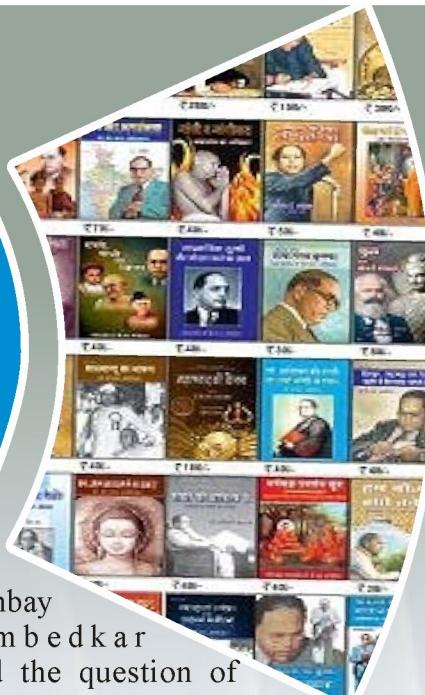
Creation of Reserved Caste: A Difficult Historical Journey

Professor Rattan Lal made it clear at the beginning of his speech that the creation of reserved class was not an easy process. He mentioned Dr. Ambedkar's first memorandum given to the South Borough Committee in 1919, in which education and employment were described as a matter of life and death for the Dalit society. At that time, there was not a single Scheduled

Caste graduate in the entire Bombay Province. Ambedkar repeatedly raised the question of education even during the formation of Simon Commission, Round Table Conference and Independent Labour Party. He presented the data in 'Grievances of Scheduled Caste' that out of 1056 ICS officers, only one was from Scheduled Caste and only one among CPWD contractors. In that era, even getting a job for three constables was a reason for celebration. Professor Lal emphasised that Dalits presented themselves as minorities in national life, as did the Muslim and Sikh communities. There was a demand for minority status till 1942-44 and on this basis constitutional protection and reservation were demanded. He raised the question, "Have you got reservation in the name of minority or in the name of majority? Just think."

Ambedkar's philosophy is practical; pressure has to be built

Professor Lal described Ambedkar's philosophy as pragmatism, which was influenced by his mentor John Dewey (Columbia University). In 1916, at the age of 24, Ambedkar wrote the first article in the Bombay Chronicle, in which he advocated building a public library instead of the bust of Firozshah Mehta. He took inspiration from Buddha, Kabir and Phule, but did not dream unrealistic dreams. Ambedkar was a supplicant, who kept demanding from the Viceroy, Congress and the government. In his 1948 Lucknow speech, he demanded separate electorate, reservation in the legislature and reservation in government jobs, but got only partial success. The professor said, "Ambedkar repeatedly said that pressure has to be built, rights have to be kept demanding." He gave the example that there was no debate on reservation in the Constituent Assembly, because everyone including Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru had a consensus of historical injustice. But today the society has turned upside down, where instead of asking, claims are being made to be 'givers'. He said sarcastically, "What will they give? We don't have a share in universities, bureaucracy, share market, foreign policy."



Facilities were provided in poor India, rights are being snatched away in rich India

Professor Lal called the rise of the Dalit middle class a by-product of modernism, industrialization and colonialism. In the 19th century, the middle class was formed from urban centers and factories, which also included Dalits. He said, "In Marxist terms, one who is not bourgeois, middle class, cannot become anything. Think tanks, bureaucrats, writers, journalists, academicians all come from the middle class." In poor India, the fees in government schools and colleges were one or two annas, stipends and fellowships were given.

In 1973, Indira Gandhi wrote a letter to all CMs to form a cell to stop atrocities on Harijans and make full appointments in the public sector. Dalits became officers through bank nationalization and got leases through land reform. Rajiv Gandhi started a special recruitment drive, opened Navodaya Vidyalayas where education was free. Crores of rupees were earned from reservation in petrol pumps and gas agencies. Employees in public sector like ONGC increased from 3000 to 21000, out of which 7500 are SC-ST-OBC and with an average salary of 1 lakh, 100 crore rupees are going to their homes every year. Two generations ago there were huts, now by becoming teachers, families are able to run. But now all this is being snatched away in rich India. Government schools and colleges are closing, quality is deteriorating and private education is so expensive that it is out of reach. Sale of gas and petrol through private pipelines is ending and jobs are decreasing due to privatization.

Weaknesses of the Dalit middle class and the desire for personal liberation

The professor raised questions on the priorities of the Dalit middle class. He said, "Billions of rupees were spent on our movements, but was there any serious research, book, article or money spent on educating children abroad? Why are our children not becoming researchers? Why are they not going to PhD, Harvard, Oxford?" He shared his experience that he reached university after studying in a small village of Bihar, but why was the entry of Dalits banned in universities, this question needs to be raised.

Protocol jobs (doctor, engineer, professor, bureaucrat) do not bring revolution, because they are part of the system. Questions on public discourse, economic and cultural policies will be raised from academia. He criticized Dalit leaders who want personal liberation – "Make me a minister, make my son CM-PM." No collective manifesto was made. He mentioned an OBC program in Hyderabad, where VP Singh and Arjun Singh were not thanked. "We are thankless people, if someone gives something, then thank you, otherwise everyone is an enemy." Ambedkar used to meet the Viceroy, Nehru, Gandhi, but did not use abusive language. Had

Ambedkar been here, he would have banged his head...

The professor advised to find Ambedkar's legacy in books and thoughts, not in statues. He said, "The biggest statues are being built in Vijayawada, Canada, Australia, but had Ambedkar been here, he would have banged his head." Ambedkar described devotion as the path of dictatorship, but society is going in the opposite direction. In his book 'Conversion: Ambedkar's Dhamma Yatra', 450 pages were selected from 15,000 pages of writings and an introduction of 50-60 pages was written.

He said that those who took Ambedkar's political legacy ignored the cultural legacy (Dhamma, research, books). In the 1948 Lucknow speech, Ambedkar talked about 'one party, one leader, one program', but where are the party-leaders today? The current Dalit politics is contrary to Ambedkar's ideas. He gave the example of the roster movement of 2018-19, where 10-20 people collected donations and got the 200-point roster implemented by removing the 13-point roster of the Supreme Court. But the society did not say thank you. Rahul Gandhi was given a seven-point Dalit emancipation manifesto, which focused on education, but education is missing in the discussion.

The professor recalled the contribution of leaders like Jagjivan Ram, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi. In 1957, Jagjivan Ram implemented reservation in promotion in railways. In 1966, he supported Indira Gandhi and made her PM, but in 1977, Jayaprakash Narayan made Morarji Desai PM despite the election being won in his name. Emergency was described as a golden period for Dalits, because lakhs of recruitments took place. But the society rejected them by calling them 'Manuvadi' or 'sycophant'. He said, "The educated cheated. The donations came from the middle class, but the employed people abused." UPA was supported, but not a single social agenda was implemented. In the Bhopal Document, 30% reservation in government purchases was also considered bad. Professor Ratan Lal said, "The Dalit society will not achieve anything without a social-political alliance. The silence of the leaders on issues like privatization, vote theft and unemployment is worrying. The crowd of lakhs of unemployed in Agniveer recruitment is proof of this." He advised the society to adopt pressure politics, as Ambedkar did. Education and employment must be made issues. "Elections are just a question, but keep the strength to make the government bow down."

He questioned the lack of seminars on education in Dalit programs and talked about making the society aware through his books ('Baba Saheb and Education', 'Ambedkar and Parliamentary Democracy'). In the end, he warned that when bombing takes place in rich India, no house will be safe. The society will have to self-evaluate and focus on education and research, only then Ambedkar's legacy can be kept alive in the true sense.

US federal court backs California's fight against caste discrimination

In a powerful affirmation of caste-oppressed communities' civil rights, the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California dismissed a lawsuit filed by the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) that claimed California's anti-caste efforts violated the religious freedoms of Hindu Americans.

The court's judgment on July 18, was issued in the case filed by the Hindu American Foundation, an American Hindu non-profit advocacy group run by privileged caste Hindu Americans. HAF had challenged the California Civil Rights Department's authority to investigate and prosecute caste discrimination, arguing that it falsely equated caste with Hinduism and infringed upon the constitutional rights of all Hindu Americans.

The Director of the California Civil Rights Department (CRD), in the judgment, found that HAF lacked standing and failed to state any viable legal claims. The court firmly rejected HAF's argument that caste protections infringe on religious rights, calling its claims "entirely unconvincing." In a statement released on July 22, the Savera coalition, a network of US-based anti-caste organizations including the Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), said the ruling marked a "historic win" for civil rights in the US. "This decision sends a strong message: caste-based exclusion and abuse have no place in our institutions," the press release said.

The court's ruling delivers a decisive blow to attempts by Hindu nationalist advocacy groups in the US to argue that caste protections amount to religious persecution. Judge Dale A Drozd noted the inconsistency in HAF's stance — claiming caste is not central to Hinduism, while also arguing that protections against caste discrimination violate Hindu religious freedom.

Four key outcomes

- Affirmation of state authority: The CRD has the constitutional right to enforce anti-discrimination laws, including against caste-based discrimination.
- Legitimacy of CRD actions: The lawsuit against Cisco Systems, a major California tech firm, was found to be a legitimate public enforcement action, not a private legal dispute.
- Rejection of religious freedom argument: The court ruled that the CRD's enforcement did not violate any First Amendment rights of Hindu Americans, dismissing the argument as "entirely unconvincing."
- No standing for HAF: The court held that HAF does not represent all Hindu Americans and failed to show concrete links to the broader community. "Plaintiffs



have shown no facts demonstrating actual activities, engagement or funding mechanisms," the judge wrote.

The case originated from CRD's 2020 lawsuit against Cisco for allegedly enabling caste-based discrimination against a Dalit engineer by higher-caste Indian-American managers. HAF had earlier tried to intervene in the Cisco case but was denied by California state courts. The federal court's July 18 ruling dismissed HAF's second amended complaint that was filed in September 2024, without leave to amend, stating that any further amendment "would be futile in this case."

South Asian response and significance

The ruling was widely welcomed by Dalit and anti-caste organisations in the US. Karthikeyan Shanmugam, convener of AKSC, called it "a historic win." In the Savera press release, he said: "This affirms that caste discrimination is a civil rights violation and cannot be shielded by claims of religious freedom." Roja Singh, president of Dalit Solidarity Forum, stated that the decision confronts decades of caste oppression in the US and ensures caste-oppressed people "can live and work with safety, dignity and equality." Vivek Kembaiyan of Hindus for Human Rights remarked, "Hindu far-right groups have weaponised the language of civil rights and religious freedom. But they continue to fail miserably in the courts." Jawad Ahmed of the Indian American Muslim Council also applauded the ruling: "This judgment affirms that no group should weaponise its identity to uphold systemic oppression." The Savera coalition called the decision "a beacon of hope," saying that caste discrimination has no place in societies that value equality and justice.

Source: The News Minutes



Metamorphosis of Dalit identities

Mitra Pariyar

Unlike the identities of ethnic and tribal groups, those of Dalits are still concealed from the public. The better a Dalit is at hiding their caste identity, deemed as 'ritually polluting,' the easier will be their life, particularly in relatively anonymous spaces of the cities like Kathmandu. Given the widespread caste hate and consequent exclusion and harassment, an estimated 60-70 percent of Dalits still hide their caste by tweaking or faking their surnames to rent properties even in the capital. There has also been a growing trend of Dalits 'officially' abandoning their caste identities and passing as members of the upper castes. My question is: How do Dalits legally change their caste and what does that mean for themselves, their families and their future generations?

Kafkaesque metamorphosis

One could designate this process of legally transforming Dalit castes into upper castes as a form of 'transmutation.' But the term does not seem suitable as a Dalit's social position doesn't automatically augment after changing their family name on their citizenship certificate and passport. They would still be an 'untouchable' for people who recognise them. A better term than that would be 'metamorphosis'.

It is not a 'social metamorphosis' either. The phrase was coined by German sociologist Ulrich Beck, in his remarkable 2016 book, *The Metamorphosis of the World*. This theory deals with the transformation of a society or societies, as a result of momentous changes in recent years, such as globalisation and digitisation and, more importantly, the extraordinary rise of machine learning and artificial intelligence.

Changing Dalit surnames to reflect higher castes is not going to change society as such. Social structure will remain intact. The

change of caste can, however, be quite a big change in the lives of individuals and societies, although the identity will be confining, potentially dangerous and rather strange.

In that regard, Franz Kafka's famous novella, *Metamorphosis*, published in 1915, may be a more comparable literature. The caste change is similar to the life of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's story, when he suddenly transforms into a strange bug. The change is sudden but full of challenges, risks and uncertainties. After becoming an upper caste, as it were, a Dalit's life becomes easier in some ways, but more dangerous and complicated in other ways. There is always the great risk of being found out, especially after freely mixing with the upper castes.

A recent case

A recent case of transforming one's caste through legal means is useful to understand, *inter alia*, why and how Dalits consider transforming themselves into higher castes and how the state has enabled their mission.

Hari Pariyar (first name altered) lives in a rented flat in suburban Kathmandu. He owns and runs two tipper trucks, hauling construction materials mainly in Bhaktapur, Kavre and Sindhupalchowk. Life is good overall, despite the ups and downs of the delivery business in the construction sector, but he and his family live in the persistent threat of caste-based humiliation.

They have been living in their space and running the business under a fake name. Considering him a member of the Chhetri caste (as suggested by his fake surname), his friends, workmates and contractors frequently crack casteist jokes with him. The jokes are aimed at dominating individuals of lower castes.

This torments Hari, but he pretends to laugh with everyone else; he doesn't muster the courage to say that he feels insulted and demeaned, even when he belongs to the caste being demeaned.

Sometimes he feels like letting the cat out of the bag. But he dares not do so, for he cannot risk losing his business. More importantly, his family would almost certainly be forced out of their rented home if the landlord found out that they are Dalits.

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City office made his life even more challenging as it made it mandatory for all tenants to get a written agreement with the

reached the desk of the Chief District Officer (CDO). The CDO denied his application, stating that, unlike Damai, Pariyar was not an offensive surname. He also gave examples of some popular folk singers—Raju Pariyar and Shiva Pariyar—to stress that Pariyar is a surname that doesn't need to be changed.

Feeling defeated, Hari approached the National Dalit Commission (NDC) in Lalitpur.

The NDC has been in charge of collating the family names of different Dalit castes, including those similar to or the same as those of the Bahun and Chhetri.

There has also been a growing trend of Dalits 'officially' abandoning their caste identities and passing as members of the upper castes. My question is: How do Dalits legally change their caste and what does that mean for themselves, their families and their future generations?

landlords before renting any property. That document would have to be accompanied by a copy of the citizenship certificates of both parties.

Hari's landlord then started asking for his citizenship certificate as required by the law. He made all sorts of excuses not to show his official documents, but he knew he could not keep it a secret for long.

Hari and his wife suffered much anxiety from this dilemma until someone told them that they could legally change their names, even to an upper caste one. To avoid further trouble, Hari and his wife decided to pursue this course of action.

He asked the Department of National ID and Civil Registration at Singha Durbar if he is allowed to convert his surname from Pariyar to Gautam.

They checked the official records and told him he was entitled to do it because Gautam had been enlisted as one of the surnames of the Damai caste.

Delighted, Hari applied for his name change at his District Administration Office in Nawalparasi. His file

The NDC officials also said that Gautam was a surname of the Damai caste, although one of the commissioners also argued, like the CDO, that the surname Pariyar was alright; it does not need to be amended to gain respect in society.

Yet, Hari persisted with his request to change his family name to Gautam. At last, the NDC reluctantly called the assistant CDO in Nawalparasi on Hari's behalf and Hari Pariyar became Hari Gautam.

Challenges and opportunities

While the state has shown zero interest in reforming religious beliefs and cultural practices to tackle the widespread problem of untouchability, it has also made it easy for Dalits to conceal their caste identities.

This neither transforms society nor curbs caste hierarchy. But at the very least, it provides breathing space for Dalits.

However, living a fake life of an upper-caste individual obviously increases their vulnerabilities. What would happen when a *Bahun* man living amongst *Bahuns* for many years is suddenly discovered to be a low caste or 'untouchable'?

In any case, there is always the fear and anxiety of being found out.

There is an opportunity for the future generations to completely mingle with the upper castes and leave their stigma behind once and for all.

This is one of the reasons why, despite the great risks, many Dalit individuals and families are opting to metamorphose themselves into upper castes.

Source: Kathmandu Post



India sees **334** verified attacks on Christians in 2025 so far: Report

In a troubling revelation, the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFIRLC) has documented 334 verified incidents of systematic targeting against Christians across India between January and July 2025.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the report highlights a consistent and alarming pattern of religious persecution, with incidents reported every month across 22 states and union territories, reflecting what EFIRLC described as a “systematic effort to suppress Christian religious expression.”

Uttar Pradesh (95 incidents) and Chhattisgarh (86), both ruled by the BJP, account for over 54% of all documented cases, emerging as the epicenters of anti-Christian violence.

These states have “emerged repeatedly as primary hot spots where Christian families face not only immediate violence but prolonged legal harassment under anti-conversion laws.

The misuse of these laws has become a primary weapon of intimidation, with threats, harassment and false accusations representing two-thirds of all incidents documented during this period.”

They are followed by Madhya Pradesh (22), Bihar (17), Karnataka (17), Rajasthan (15) and Haryana (15)—states that have also witnessed a rise in hostility towards Christian communities.

Particularly disturbing, said the report, are the “13 cases involving denial of burial rights, with 92% occurring in

Chhattisgarh alone”. “Christian families are prevented from honouring their deceased according to their faith even on private property,” it stated.

The report also highlighted a strategic pattern of attacks on Sundays, during church services and prayer gatherings, suggesting organised monitoring and deliberate disruption of Christian religious life.

The report noted that the 334 documented cases “likely represent only a fraction of actual incidents, as many go unreported due to fear of reprisals, intimidation by local authorities or lack of access to documentation channels.”

In addition, it maintained that the pattern reveals “a coordinated effort to suppress Christian religious expression through both legal mechanisms and social pressure, creating a climate of fear that extends far beyond the immediate victims to entire communities.”

EFIRLC said it compiles data from multiple sources, including victim testimonies, local partner networks, media monitoring, police reports, medical records and photographic evidence, ensuring thorough verification wherever possible.

In January, the United Christian Forum had recorded 834 attacks on Christians in India in 2024, which is 100 more than in 2023. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom in March 2025 has designated India as a “Country of Particular Concern” for its attacks on religious minorities, Muslims and Christians in particular.

Source: KMS News



Report exposes forced conversions through marriages

Irfan Aslam

The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), in collaboration with the Legal Aid Society (LAS), launched a research report and documentary examining the drivers of forced conversions through marriages (FCM) and their impact on survivors, minority communities and wider society.

The launch took place at a national dialogue in Islamabad, which brought together legal experts, rights activists and criminal justice professionals to discuss practical steps for tackling the issue. Justice Dr Syed Muhammad Anwer attended the ceremony as a chief guest.

The report, presented by LAS Director Maliha Zia, draws on survivors' testimonies and clarifies the concepts of 'force' and 'consent' in cases of FCM.

It categorises the motivations of perpetrators — including religious and ideological factors, trafficking, as well as the vulnerabilities of survivors, particularly women and girls from minority communities.

A documentary by filmmaker Aisha Gazdar was also screened highlighting the human dimension of forced

conversions and marriages.

NCHR Chairperson Rabiya Agha said the practice is a 'deeply entrenched problem' in Pakistan, disproportionately affecting girls and women from minority communities despite constitutional safeguards.

She noted that the commission has taken suo motu notices in several cases where minor girls were abducted, forcibly converted and married to their abductors. In some instances, they were provided relief through NCHR's intervention.

CEO LAS Haya Emaan Zahid warned that survivors of FCM often face severe psychological trauma, physical and sexual abuse and social stigma.

"This practice not only devastates individuals but also undermines communal solidarity and damages the culture," she said.

The event concluded with a panel discussion where experts and activists exchanged insights and stressed the need for stronger protection mechanisms to safeguard the rights of minorities in Pakistan.

Source: Tribune Pakistan



UN experts, Freedom House, USCIRF call on US to designate INDIA as "Country of Particular Concern"

Senior officials from the United Nations and the United States, along with leading human rights experts, urged the US government to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) due to its serious and ongoing human rights and religious freedom violations.

The call was made during a congressional briefing on Capitol Hill on July 17, attended by over 100 congressional staff members. The Indian government has repeatedly dismissed the allegation of sliding democratic values and religious freedom in the country, accusing rights groups and UN experts of bias and prejudice.

Speakers included Professor Nicolas Levrat, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues; Ed O'Donovan, Senior Adviser to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders; Dr. Asif Mahmood, Vice Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF); Freedom House President Annie Boyajian; and Ria Chakrabarty, Senior Policy Director at Hindus for Human Rights (HFHR).

Professor Levrat stated that while India portrays itself as the world's largest democracy, it is "currently not living up to this appellation, as it fails to protect the most fundamental human rights of millions of its citizens."

"India is falling short, very short of its legal obligations. Its current government is not only failing to protect persons belonging to minorities, but also creates and actively promotes conditions that deliberately target persons belonging to minorities, putting them at risk, not only as regards their way of life, but also as regards their very life," said Professor Levrat.

"Not only is India failing its responsibility to protect its own citizens, especially those belonging to minorities, but the authorities are actually creating conditions for extremists groups or local authorities to maintain and even increase insecurity for Muslims and other religious minorities in India," Professor Levrat added.

"This leads not only to violation of their freedoms, but also to killings. Governments should guarantee respect for human rights for all, including persons belonging to minorities."

The Swiss academic further noted that he and two other UN Special Rapporteurs wrote to the Indian Government in 2024, asking for measures to be taken to guarantee the safety of minorities and to avoid hate speech by government officials. In this letter, Special Rapporteurs flagged concerns about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's use of hate speech during Indian elections, as well as the reported refusal of state police and the Electoral Commission to acknowledge complaints made regarding such speeches and failing to conduct formal investigations.

"Unfortunately and despite its commitment as a Member State of the UN, the Indian Government never answered this allegation letter," he said.

The Special Rapporteur called on elected representatives to pressure governments, including the government of India, to guarantee respect for human rights for all.

Freedom House President Annie Boyajian expressed serious concerns about declining freedoms in India, targeting of the political opposition and spoke extensively on reasons behind downgrading India from "Free" to "Partly Free."

"We have, unfortunately, seen 19 consecutive years of decline in freedom around the world, including in India. India's score has declined in the last decade and it has lost 15 points since 2014 and this is fairly significant due to discriminatory policies and a rise in persecution," Boyajian said in her remarks.

"In our most recent edition, which came out in February, India's score dropped by 3 points because of challenges to the political opposition during Parliamentary elections in the spring," she added.

On transnational repression, she said that "India is the only democracy we have tracked that is involved in transnational repression. Since 2014, we have documented 14 incidents perpetrated by India."





Boyajian called on the Indian government to review and restructure the anti-conversion laws, build legal and societal protections for victims of religious violence, strengthen police accountability and field-level response, protect religious spaces and ensure the prosecution of perpetrators and prevent impunity. She also called on the US Department of State to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern and impose sanctions on individuals and entities.

Ed O'Donovan, Senior Adviser to UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, called the treatment of human rights defenders in India “wanton cruelty” and said that the overall environment continues to grow more hostile by the day.

He raised concerns about the judicial harassment and arbitrary detention of activists working on a range of issues, including defenders of Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim rights.

“Indian authorities have perverted the concept of due process and turned it into punishment,” he said.

He also spoke about arrests of activists, academics and lawyers in the Bhima Koregaon case, shuttering of thousands of NGOs by revoking their Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) licenses “to stifle dissent and restrict civil society space.” He also raised concerns about the crackdown on civil society in Jammu and Kashmir, including the arrest of activist Khurram Parvez and journalist Irfan Meraj, both of whom have remained behind bars under the draconian anti-terror law UAPA. According to O'Donovan, the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders has sent 40 letters to the Indian government since 2020, making it the country which received the third highest number of allegation letters from the mandate. The Indian government has only responded to 20 per cent of these letters.

He called on the International community, including the UN and the elected representatives, to call out the Indian government for its violations against human rights

defenders and called for a congressional visit focusing on the legal framework for civil society and human rights defenders and designating India as Country of Particular Concern and inducing human rights clauses to weapons sales to India.

Dr Asif Mahmood, Vice Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), who submitted pre-recorded remarks, emphasised that USCIRF has been recommending that India be designated as a CPC since 2020. The State Department has yet to make this designation.

“In USCIRF's 2025 annual report, we recommended that the US government impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities, including India's Research and Analysis Wing for their culpability in transnational repression, most notably the 2023 assassination attempt of a Sikh activist in New York and the killing of another Sikh activist in Canada,” said Mahmood.

“We urge members of Congress to conduct full investigations into transnational repression allegations.

We will also continue to push the US government to designate India as a CPC and to take concrete policy actions, including imposing financial and visa restrictions.”

“From majoritarianism to oligarchy to anti-democratic governance, Modi has used every tool in the authoritarian playbook to crush the spirit of Indian democracy,” said Ria Chakrabarty, Senior Policy Director at Hindus for Human Rights. “And the only way to protect a democracy and the rights of the people is to retake power from aspiring autocrats and the movements that support them,” Ria added.

The briefing was cosponsored by the Indian American Muslim Council, Genocide Watch, World Against Genocide, Hindus for Human Rights, New York State Council of Churches, The Religious Nationalisms Project, American Muslim Institution, Association of Indian Muslims of America, The Humanism Project (Australia) and the Center for Pluralism.

Source: Maktoob Media



Cast(e) in stone: An exploration of how inequality exists in a global village and not just India



In July 2023, a video went viral of a dominant caste man, reported to be a Brahmin, urinating on a tribal man in Madhya Pradesh. The latter sat slouching and the culprit, identified as a 'pandit', towered over him, urinating on his face and body. More disturbing than the incident was the support the culprit subsequently received from his community.

In September 2024, in Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada district, a 67-year-old Dalit man was brutally assaulted by a high-caste Gowda shopkeeper with a wooden pole when the former sought shelter from heavy rain and wanted to rest near the shop.

More recently, in Uttar Pradesh's Etawah, a group of upper-caste men allegedly tonsured the head of a katha vaachak (religious preacher) and his aide after finding that they hailed from the Yadav community.

Shortly after this incident, in Odisha's Ganjam district, men of the Dalit Pana community were beaten up and forced to crawl with grass blades between their teeth and also to drink drain water by so-called Savarnas (dominant castes). They were alleged to have smuggled cattle which came out to be a falsehood.

These are just a tiny sample from a regular flow of such news from across India's vast geography and cultural landscape. The political dispensation of a state hardly makes a difference.

Caste consciousness, in all its shameful manifestations, is ingrained in the Indian psyche and except the occasional expression of disgust and surprise, such incidents hardly shake the national conscience in any effective way. But is it just an Indian phenomenon?

Caste beyond borders

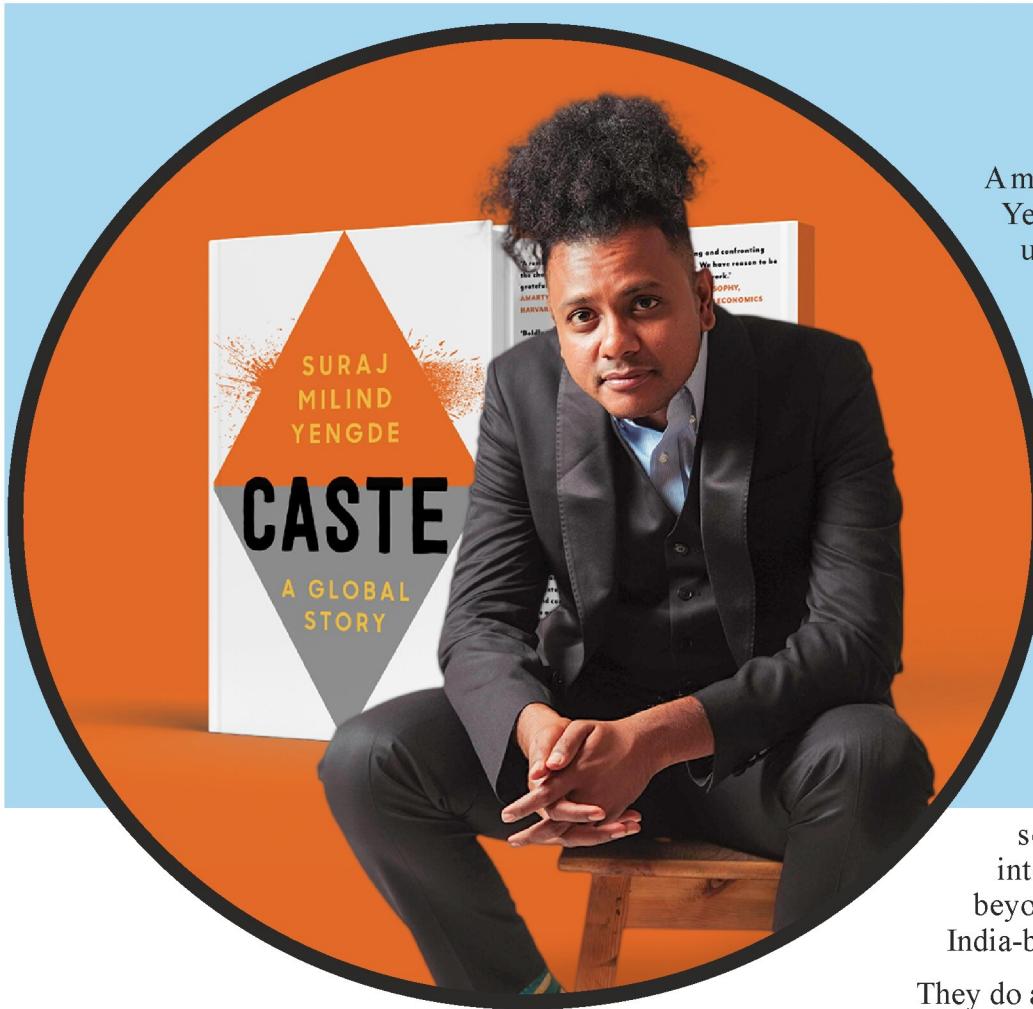


After penning *Caste Matters* and co-authoring *The Radical in Ambedkar*, Suraj Milind Yengde has come out with his latest to shed light on caste's obstinate tendency to exist and stir societies in faraway lands and climes.

Caste: A Global Story is an outcome of the author's decade-long research based on historiography, archival resources, ethnography and personal encounters, bringing to the fore contemporary Dalit experiences among the Indian diaspora from the Caribbean to Europe, to Africa, to the Middle-East and to South Asia.

A WEB Du Bois Fellow at Harvard University, Yengde is a world-renowned scholar on caste studies. Named among the '25 Most Influential Young Indian' by GQ magazine, he spent his childhood in Nanded, the headquarters town of the district by the same name in Marathwada.

The region has been home to one of the most radical forms of Dalit politics for over a century where visions of Kabir and Ravidas found resonance among the underprivileged before—aided by a Dalit-Black bond and BR Ambedkar's ideas of fighting upper-caste dominance—it created an early template of Dalit political activism. The author writes with a position of seeing and experiencing caste politics at close quarters.



Literature as resistance

A deep insight is offered into literature becoming a powerful starting point of Dalit assertion of identity and dignity. It has been a way to reclaim an area, which from time immemorial remained out of reach for the oppressed and as an exclusive domain of the dominant, particularly Brahmins.

It helped challenge the age-old narrative of impurity and punishment and assert Dalit agency. A comparative study of Black and Dalit literature brings out similarities and points of divergence.

While both said how discriminations were institutionalised, Dalit literature looked at caste hierarchies couched in religious and social sanctions whereas Black subjugation stemmed from centuries of slavery and a system of apartheid based on colour. What tied the two strands was a spirit to rise above hardened debilitating subjugation.

A substantial fieldwork is done in Trinidad, one of the earliest destinations of indentured labour from India where 40% of the population is of Indian origin.

A majority of them belong to low-caste hierarchies.

Yengde meets community leaders and tries to understand the caste dynamics on a distant land from their ancestors'

Do castes play a role in Trinidadian society? Interestingly, they do, but only in religious institutions and in trying to find worship and fellowship in the Hindu dharma. They are nearly absent in people's lives in terms of intense rigidities found in India.

Conversations with people like Pandit Amar Sreeprasad, an Ahir by caste; Pandit Parasaram who draws a Brahmin lineage; and Ravi Maharaj, an RSS functionary, are interesting and revealing.

The author traces anti-caste movements across the world, their political assertions, setbacks, achievements. What offers an interesting insight is how Dalit organisations beyond the shores are not sponsored or supported by India-based institutions.

They do appear as a disparate set of anti-caste believers under the banner of Ambedkar, Ravidas, Valmiki, Dalit Christian or Buddhist congregations, but somewhere their commitment to raise their community issues and seek social justice unite them into a single bloc.

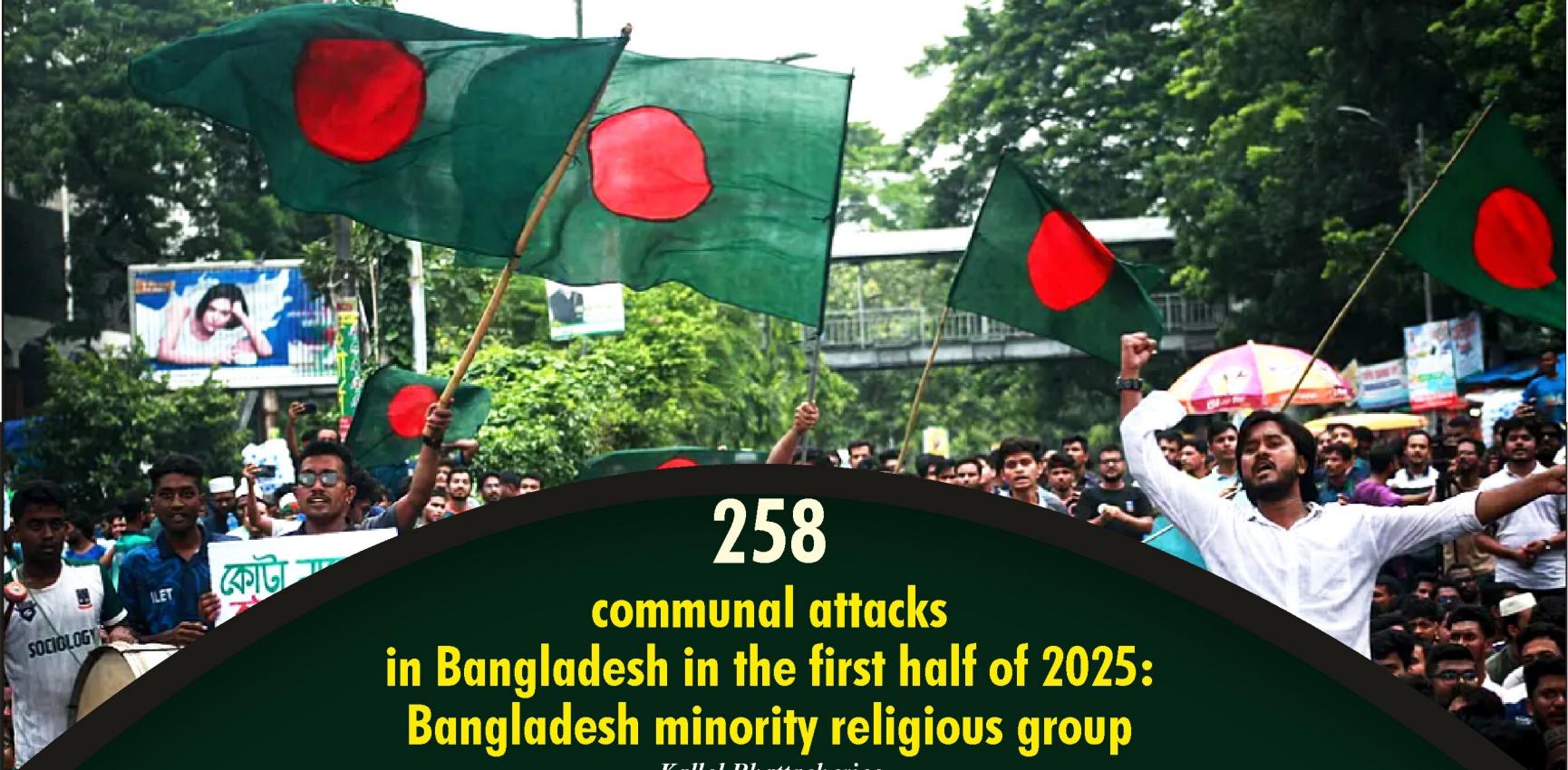
Yengde makes the point that the ability of caste to transcend time and space must be analysed through its multiple 'diasporic nations' that draws from one site of origin—India.

He has also been immensely successful in bringing out parallels that exist in experiences of caste and race oppression, making a case for a global solidarity to fight inequalities.

At the same time, an appeal goes out to dominant castes, who are carriers of social and religious creed that cannot tolerate human equality, to self-educate and agitate against the caste system rather than stand by it.

Thought-provoking, the book offers quite a few new insights into caste dynamics in the global village that we live in. To borrow from Amartya Sen's crisp Foreword, nearly verbatim, it is a remarkable work to understand and confront the challenges of cast-in-stone inequalities worldwide.





258 communal attacks in Bangladesh in the first half of 2025: Bangladesh minority religious group

Kallol Bhattacherjee

The largest minority organization of Bangladesh has accused the interim government led by Prof Mohammed Yunus of inaction on incidents of violence against the minority communities.

In the first half of 2025, Bangladesh has witnessed 258 incidents of violence against the minority communities, the largest minority organization of Bangladesh has said on July 10, 2025. In a press conference in the National Press Club of Dhaka, Bangladesh Hindu Bouddho Christian Oikyo Parishad said the interim government has not been able to stop violence against religious minority communities and that the inaction of the government has emboldened the miscreants carrying out these attacks.

“The government has denied occurrence of communal violence by describing them as political incidents. As a result, the perpetrators of these crimes have become emboldened increasing the insecurity of the minority religious communities,” a press statement from the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddho Christian Oikyo Parishad enumerating 258 crimes committed during the first six months of 2025.

Out of the total incidents, the Parishad said there were 20 incidents of rape, 59 attacks on the places of worship. The report counted 12 attacks on the adivasi communities of Bangladesh. “Between 4 August 2024 and 31 December 2024, there were 2184 violent incidents targeting minority

communities of Bangladesh. This year so far, there have been 258 incidents. That means since last 4 August till now, there have been 2442 incidents of violence against the minority religious communities of Bangladesh,” said the organisation in its press note.

“After the change of government in 2024, communal attacks started in Bangladesh with a new intensity. These barbaric incidents have continued till now,” said the group accusing the interim government led by Prof Mohammed Yunus of inaction. The Bangladesh Hindu Bouddho Christian Oikyo Parishad which is the oldest group of the minority religious communities in Bangladesh started in the backdrop of rising communal incidents in the early 1960s and has been vocal about the safety requirements of the minority groups in the country.

“We have noted with regret that the government has adopted the strategy of describing communal violence as concocted lies,” said the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddho Christian Oikyo Parishad noting that ultimately because of growing public pressure, the interim government on 10 December 2024 acknowledged that the minority communities were attacked. “Already 70 individuals are under arrest in 88 cases of violence,” said the press statement. The interim government of Bangladesh is yet to respond to the report from the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddho Christian Oikyo Parishad.

Source: The Hindu

Recommendations to the EU on a New Strategic EU-India Agenda

Human Rights Watch recommends that the European Union (EU)'s new strategic agenda for relations with India highlights and addresses the decline in India's human rights record and rule of law, as well as democratic and secular values. Ending the EU's silence on these matters and linking bilateral ties to clear and enforceable human rights obligations is key to contain and counter India's authoritarian backsliding and to support and protect India's human rights and democratic institutions and civil society. Persistent failure to do so will instead further embolden the government's repressive and divisive agenda, weaken the rule of law and ultimately be detrimental to the EU's pursuit of closer political, economic and security ties with India. Below is an overview of the main areas of concern in India's human rights record, followed by a detailed list of recommendations for the EU to address, including in its ongoing and future engagement with India's authorities.

Main Human Rights Concerns on India

Weakening Rule of Law

Politicization of Independent Institutions

Federal law enforcement agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation are used by the Indian authorities to target human rights defenders, opposition leaders, independent media and other critics with politically motivated allegations of corruption or financial irregularities. These accusations tend to stall or disappear against political opponents if they leave their political party to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a mechanism the opposition has dubbed the "washing machine."

Weaponization of Laws

The government is weaponizing abusive laws and passing new overbroad and vague laws to target human rights defenders, civil society groups and critics of the government. Notably, it uses a range of counterterrorism, foreign funding, preventive detention and anti-money laundering laws, including the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), the Unlawful Activities



(Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA) and others.

The Modi government has shut down foreign funding for thousands of civil society groups, particularly those that work on human rights or the rights of vulnerable communities, using the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Over 20,600 NGOs have lost their license to receive foreign funding in the last 10 years, many of the groups that have long promoted human rights and democracy.

The authorities also continue to arrest human rights defenders, journalists, students and academics with impunity under the UAPA, India's abusive counterterrorism law, under which the courts have repeatedly denied suspects bail for years. Some of the most prominent cases include Kashmiri activist Khurram Parvez in detention since November 2021 and Kashmiri journalists Irfan Mehraj and Majid Hyderi, detained since 2023. In addition, 16 prominent activists are being prosecuted in the Bhima Koregaon case, accused of being supporters of Maoist fighters; one of them died in custody, nine have received bail, while six remain in detention without trial, some for nearly six years. The courts have repeatedly questioned the evidence against them. According to reports by the US-based forensic firm Arsenal Consulting, malware was used to surveil and plant evidence on the computers of at least three accused in this case.

Indian authorities have also allegedly conducted biased investigations involving arrests of activists in cases related to the February 2020 violence in Delhi following

peaceful protests against the discriminatory Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Police arrested 18 student leaders and activists, most of them Muslim, under the counterterrorism law. A majority remain in detention, some for nearly five years without trial. Six have been granted bail by various courts, which noted that the police failed to produce any evidence. In some cases, judges called the police investigations “shoddy” or “callous.” The UN Human Rights Committee called for the review and amendment of these laws following an evaluation of India in June 2024. The same month, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – of which the European Commission and several EU states are members – following its mutual evaluation of India's regimes to counter money laundering and terrorist financing, recommended that India put in place measures to prevent the abuse of counterterrorism policies against non-governmental groups.

Accountability Bodies Weakened

The National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRCI) has repeatedly failed to address the escalating human rights violations in the country. As a result, the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) recommended to downgrade the NHRCI's accreditation in March 2025. The national commissions to protect religious minorities, women, children, Dalits and Adivasis and those living with disabilities, are all barely functional because of political appointments.

Incitement to Violence Against Minorities

Anti-minority speech has become normalized in India, especially targeting Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. There has been a significant increase in hate speech by officials and ruling party leaders, including Prime Minister Modi and incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence against marginalized groups and attacks against religious minorities. There has been an increase in mob attacks and normalization of violence against minorities especially in BJP-ruled states as the authorities have failed to take adequate action against those responsible.

The Indian government also continues to use discriminatory laws against religious minorities. As a result, millions of Muslims risk losing their citizenship. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, that came into effect in March 2024, discriminates against Muslims, making religion the basis to fast-track citizenship. Coupled with the Indian government's push for a nationwide citizenship verification process through a National Population Register and a proposed National Register of Citizens aimed at identifying “illegal migrants,” the law has heightened fears that millions of



Anti-minority speech has become normalized in India, especially targeting Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. There has been a significant increase in hate speech by officials and ruling party leaders, including Prime Minister Modi.

Indian Muslims could be stripped of their citizenship rights and disenfranchised.

“Anti-conversion laws” are enforced in at least 10 of India's 28 states, forbidding forced religious conversion but in fact using broad and vague language that can be used to target voluntary conversion. These laws violate international human rights standards and have been used by the authorities to harass religious minorities, especially Christians from Dalit and Adivasi communities and have emboldened vigilante violence. Various state governments led by the BJP adopted punitive demolitions of Muslim homes and properties as a de facto state policy which was condemned by the Supreme Court of India in November 2024. However, the demolitions have continued in violation of Supreme Court guidelines, especially in BJP-ruled states.

Fresh Violence in Conflict-Ridden Areas

Jammu and Kashmir

Government claims that it has restored peace and security in the region is not borne out by recent developments. On April 22, a militant attack killed 26 people, mostly Hindu tourists, in Pahalgam. The authorities' repressive response has put Muslims at risk throughout India. Since the militant attack, security forces have imposed summary punishments, blowing up the homes of alleged militants—actions that the Supreme Court has already prohibited after similar abuses elsewhere. Angry rhetoric by nationalist broadcast networks and social media users is sparking fears of Hindu mob revenge attacks against Muslims, particularly Kashmiris. Some of India's state governments carried out mass arrests of Muslims to identify irregular migrants. Police in the state of Uttar Pradesh filed criminal charges against two activists for posts criticizing the government's failure to ensure security in Pahalgam. The Jammu region, considered relatively more peaceful until 2019, saw a spike in violence in 2024, leading to the deaths of at least 15 soldiers and 9 civilians.

Religious minorities and migrant workers continue to face risk of targeted attacks. The situation in the Kashmir Valley remains repressive, with journalists and human rights defenders regularly detained under the counterterrorism and preventive detention laws and facing systematic restrictions on their freedom of movement both within and outside the country. Indian security forces have been implicated in arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings. There has been no accountability for recent and past alleged extrajudicial killings and other abuses by the security forces, in part because of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), which provides members of the armed forces effective immunity from prosecution. Since the law came into force in Jammu and Kashmir in 1990, the Indian government has not granted permission to prosecute any security force personnel in civilian courts.

Manipur

India's northeastern state of Manipur, on the border with Myanmar, has been wracked by ethnic violence since May 2023, resulting in the deaths of more than 260 people and displacing over 60,000, a consequence of the divisive politics of the former BJP chief minister. In February 2025, the central government imposed president's rule because of the failings of the state government. India's Supreme Court expressed concerns over what it termed the "absolute breakdown of law and order" in Manipur after the breakout of ethnic violence between the predominant, largely Hindu, Meitei community and the tribal, mostly Christian, Kuki-Zo communities. Armed groups on both sides, dormant for years, have become active again, raising concerns over continuing violence and destabilizing India's other northeast states where peace remains fragile following several separatist insurgencies. The European Parliament and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights have spoken out about the ongoing hostilities and abuses in Manipur.

Digital Authoritarianism

The Indian government uses technology as part of its broadening crackdown on rights, including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. India continues to impose the largest number of internet shutdowns globally, often to shut down protests or criticism of the government. This in turn disproportionately hurts communities living with poverty that depend on the government's social protection measures for food and livelihoods, as the "Digital India" program has made regular internet access vital for delivering key public services.

In addition, the Personal Data Protection Act, Information Technology Act and related rules empower

the authorities to undermine privacy safeguards and block online content and enable unchecked state surveillance. India has also been implicated in using Pegasus, the spyware produced by the Israel-based company NSO Group, to target activists and political opponents. The government has also clamped down on free speech online by frequently ordering social media platforms to block online content and through enacting laws to regulate online content that allow for greater control and censorship.

In February 2021, the government enacted the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The IT Rules allow for greater governmental control over online content, threaten to weaken encryption and seriously undermine media freedoms, rights to privacy and freedom of expression online. The rules require traceability of information that compromise end-to-end encryption on platforms such as WhatsApp or Signal. The rules also require social media companies with more than five million registered users in India – which pretty much means all the major social media and messaging platforms – to appoint local staff in-country. With more of their personnel living in India, where they could face criminal liability and prosecution, companies will face more arbitrary and disproportionate government pressure to take down content or hand over data on users.

Transnational Repression

Several foreign governments have accused Indian officials of targeting terrorism suspects and separatist leaders for assassination in Canada, the United States and elsewhere. In October 2024, Canada's national police service issued a public statement on the alleged role of Indian state agents in criminal activity on Canadian soil, including homicide, extortion and other violence. Indian authorities have canceled visas or denied entry to government critics including journalists and academics and members of the diaspora.

In September 2022, clashes between British Hindus and Muslims in Leicester city in the UK highlighted how BJP's ultra-nationalism is spreading beyond India's borders and can cause harm. Officials in Leicester had pointed to how "misinformation" spread on social media had played a "huge role" in the violence and experts and analysts found that most of the incendiary tweets, rumors and lies came from India, with hashtags such as #Leicester, #HindusUnderAttack and #HindusUnderattackinUK. Meanwhile, the one-sided response from the Indian High Commission condemning the "vandalisation of premises and symbols of the Hindu religion" simply aggravated the situation.

The Bangladesh interim government has accused India of misinformation regarding attacks on minorities.

Recommendations

Human Rights Watch recommends that the “shared democratic values” said to be underpinning its partnership with India are concretely operationalized throughout all aspects of EU's bilateral relations and strategic agenda with India. That requires, in particular:

1. Publicly as well as privately raising concerns about abuses in India, including in the margins of summits and other high-level engagements and in statements by the EU's High Representative, spokesperson and at the UN Human Rights Council;
2. Ensuring that a Free Trade Agreement with India includes binding and enforceable trade and sustainable development provisions, linked to respect for human and labor rights obligations; and
3. Linking progress on bilateral relations to concrete and measurable human rights progress and benchmarks. Specifically, the EU should press Indian authorities to:
 - Release all those detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights and drop all baseless charges against human rights defenders, activists and journalists, including Khurram Parvez; detained journalists Irfan Mehraj and Majid Hyderi; the activists in the Bhima Koregaon case; and the activists, students and opposition politicians detained or charged in relation to the communal violence in Delhi in February 2020.
 - Amend or reform restrictive legislation, including the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Foreign Contributions (Regulations) Act (FCRA), to comply with international human rights standards.
 - Repeal the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA), the National Security Act (NSA) and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. In parallel, ensure that military personnel suspected of having committed serious human rights violations are brought to justice in fair trials before civilian courts.
 - End discriminatory policies and practices and ensure prompt, impartial and effective investigations into unlawful violence, including gender-based violence, against minorities and persons from marginalized groups, including Dalits and Adivasis.
 - Act to restore security in Manipur in accordance with human rights law, ensure assistance reaches all in need and work to build trust among communities. Members of armed groups and state security forces should be held accountable for abuses.

- Demobilize and disarm vigilante groups in Manipur, ensure prompt reparation for victims and survivors of abuses and provide for impartial justice and accountability measures.
- Cease efforts to censor and control independent media through the introduction of repressive laws and efforts to regulate content on digital platforms that restrict free speech and undermine journalistic independence, including by repealing the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 and amending the Information Technology Act and related rules.
- Stop targeting foreign journalists with retaliatory administrative measures such as shortening visas, denying work permits or revoking residency permits. The ability of journalists to report on matters of public interest should not be unduly restricted.
- End broad, indiscriminate and harmful internet shutdowns, ensuring any internet restrictions comply with the requirements of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination and are limited in temporal scope and that every shutdown order is published in line with Indian Supreme Court directives.
- Establish proper judicial and parliamentary oversight of intelligence agencies and government surveillance measures that fully comply with international standards on privacy and civil liberties.
- Withdraw support for Myanmar's abusive junta, seek war crimes accountability in Sri Lanka and Nepal and join global efforts to seek international justice for war crimes and other atrocity crimes committed in Afghanistan, Gaza, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere.
- Investigate serious allegations of transnational repression, including credible allegations that Indian agents have engaged in online disinformation campaigns against academics & activists in foreign countries.
- Ensure accountability for human rights violations, taking concrete and timely steps to implement the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee, GANHRI, FATF and India's accepted recommendations at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) & urgently address concerns at the multilateral level regarding the human rights situation in India.

Human Rights Watch stands ready to remain engaged in the process and provide further information and recommendations.

Source: Human Rights Watch



Experts at NSS event discuss how to end caste discrimination



Campaigners highlighted the need to ban discrimination based on perceived 'caste' during a National Secular Society event in Leicester.

Caste systems are rooted in religious and cultural beliefs and are upheld in some Hindu and Sikh communities. There are an estimated 50,000 – 200,000 people in the UK who are regarded by some as 'low caste' (sometimes known as 'dalits') and are at risk of caste discrimination. But unlike discrimination based on race, sex, sexuality or religion or belief, caste discrimination is not explicitly prohibited in UK law.

The panel discussion on caste discrimination, co-hosted by Leicester Secular Society (LSS) and held at Leicester Secular Hall, aimed to bring together campaigners and experts to explain how caste discrimination and prejudice affect the lives of people in the UK and why some religious groups have opposed laws against caste discrimination. The event was attended by around 70 people and entry was free for NSS and LSS members.

The panel included:

- Santosh Dass, chair of the Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA), who said caste has "migrated" to the UK and explained how, in recent years, caste-based attitudes have been found in UK institutions including charities and the NHS. She highlighted ACDA's recent success in convincing the Black Member's Conference of UNISON, the UK's largest union, to pass a policy to ban caste discrimination last month.
- Annapurna Waughray, Professor of Human Rights Law at Manchester Metropolitan University, explained how the Equality Act 2010 includes an amendment that requires the Government to include caste discrimination as form of race discrimination in the act. However, this has not been enacted, leaving those facing caste discrimination having to rely on precarious case law to find justice.
- Director of the Dalit Solidarity Network UK Dr Elizabeth Joy talked about the work of her

organisation, including its "everyday casteism" campaign encouraging victims of caste discrimination to report their experiences.

- Women's rights campaigner Sahdaish Pall raised the intersecting nature of so-called 'honour crimes' and other forms of violence against women with caste-based prejudice and discrimination.
- Sat Pal Muman, chair of Caste Watch UK, highlighted research which has found caste discrimination present in UK workplaces and universities. This included instances of physical and sexual assault. He also explained how Hinduism maintains the caste system.
- Amar, who sits on the board of directors for LSS and co-organised the discussion, gave his personal experiences of caste-based prejudice. This included LSS being threatened with police action by Hindu Council UK (HCUK) when it held a talk critical of the caste system in Hinduism. HCUK has been highly vocal in its opposition to anti-caste discrimination law. Following that talk, Amar proposed to the board of directors that eliminating caste discrimination be included in LSS's aims under its commitment to justice and fairness. The proposal was accepted by the board.

NSS head of campaigns Megan Manson, who chaired the panel, said: "Caste discrimination is poorly understood in the UK and some religious groups have tried to shut down discussion about it. That's why we need to talk about it. "It's clear from our discussions that equality law must be strengthened to protect everyone from caste discrimination. We will continue to work with campaigners in this field to put pressure on the Government to make this a reality.

"We would like to thank all our panellists and everyone at Leicester Secular Society, for their excellent contributions to this event."

Source: Secularism



Nine Hindus rescued from forced labour in Khuzdar

Authorities have rescued nine members of the Hindu community from forced labor in the remote area of Khura, located in the Gresha tehsil of Khuzdar district.

The operation was launched following a formal request by Senator Dhanesh Kumar to Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti, who took notice and directed high-level authorities to intervene.

Acting on the chief minister's orders, the Commissioner of Kalat Division supervised a swift operation led by the Levies Force.

The team departed early in the morning and reached the site around 9:00 am, where they raided the premises and found the laborers being compelled to work under coercive conditions.

Two influential landlords, identified as Babu and Dad Mohammad Baloch, were arrested.

All rescued individuals, including men, women and children, belong to the Hindu community from Sanghar

district in Sindh. They were reportedly brought to Balochistan under pretense and later forced to work on farmlands at gunpoint.

The victims have been moved to the Levies station in Nal, where their statements were recorded. Once legal formalities are completed, they will be handed over to the Hindu Panchayat.

The incident has drawn widespread condemnation and is being described as a grave violation of human rights. Human rights groups, the Hindu Panchayat and civil society have welcomed the Balochistan government's prompt response.

Senator Dhanesh Kumar said that such acts of cruelty against minorities would not be tolerated and praised the chief minister for taking timely and decisive action.

Source: The News

Lawmaker in India offers reward for attacking Christians



The CBCI argued that such statements "warrant immediate and decisive legal intervention, particularly when the incitement is explicit, direct and poses an imminent threat to public order."

The bishops said the speech constitutes "a clear instance of incitement to religiously motivated violence, amounting to a grave offense under Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023 which penalizes acts that promote enmity between different groups and threaten the unity and integrity of the nation."

The CBCI sharply criticized law enforcement's failure to act, stating, "Despite this and despite peaceful demonstrations by thousands of concerned citizens, law enforcement authorities have reportedly failed to register even a First Information Report (FIR). This inaction stands in stark contrast to the swift legal response often seen against students, activists and opposition leaders for far less serious expressions, such as social media posts or peaceful dissent." The bishops described such selective enforcement as "a grave breach of the Constitution" that "reflects an alarming erosion of institutional impartiality."

Padalkar made the controversial statements during a torch march in Sangli's Kupwad area on June 17, targeting Christian priests and pastors whom he accused of forced religious conversions. The remarks came after a 28-year-old pregnant woman, Rutuja Rajage, died by suicide in Sangli District, with the legislator blaming her death on alleged pressure from in-laws to convert to Christianity, though he provided no evidence for such claims.

Escalating Anti-Christian Rhetoric

During the torch march, Padalkar delivered a series of inflammatory statements targeting Christians and Muslims.

Beside the tiered reward system for attacks on Christian missionaries, the legislator called those involved in "Love Jihad" (in reference to Muslims) as "green snakes" and those "forcing Christianity on others" as "pythons," stating: "We need to run 'JCB' on such pythons," referring to using heavy construction machinery to crush them. Padalkar also threatened what he called unauthorized prayer houses, demanding that local officials "declare a list of all unauthorized prayer houses in Sangli District, as soon as possible and on the third day, such prayer houses should be demolished."

"If a person has a government job based on reservations under Hindu Dharma and they are following a different religion, they should be dismissed," he added. The MLA assured attendees he would "try to bring a law against conversion of religion in the monsoon session of the state legislative assembly" and assured them: "Eliminate those coming for your conversions and I will take care of the police."

Massive Statewide Protests

Padalkar's announcement triggered widespread demonstrations across Maharashtra. On July 11, thousands of Christians from various denominations gathered in the capital city Mumbai's Azad Maidan for a six-hour protest organized by the Sakal Christi Samaj and supported by more than 20 Christian organizations. The demonstration attracted prominent political leaders including Members of Parliament from the Indian National Congress (INC) Bhai Jagtap, Varsha Gaikwad and Vijay Wadettiwar and leaders from other prominent opposition parties such as the Nationalist Congress Party's Jayant Patil and the Samajwadi Party's Abu Azmi. The Rev. Frazer Mascarenhas, former principal of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai and Janet D'Souza, former vice-chairperson of the Maharashtra Minority Commission, also participated. INC MP Varsha Gaikwad condemned what she called the government's "policy of 'Mislead, Divide and Rule'" and stated: "Fundamentally, the ideology of RSS-BJP is to spread hatred in society and divide the nation. In Maharashtra today, injustice is constantly being done to the poor, Dalits, Adivasis and minorities." criminal charges against the legislator.

Similar protests erupted in Pune on July 8, where members of the Pune Christian Forum staged demonstrations outside the District Collector's Office. Christians in Jalna district held a morda (front) on June 30, with protesters carrying placards and demanding Protests demanded Padalkar's immediate disqualification from his legislative post and called for criminal charges under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (India's new criminal code), including incitement to violence, rioting and encouragement to commit murder.

commit murder.

The demonstration was part of a broader statewide protest movement, with similar dharnas [sit-in protests] and morchas held across multiple cities and districts in Maharashtra.

Norbert Mendonsa, vice president of the Bombay Catholic Sabha, confirmed that the issue has been formally raised in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, which was in session during the protests. The Christian community expressed hope that the matter would receive appropriate attention from lawmakers.

Church Leaders Condemn Threats

The Rev. Vijayesh Lal, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, said that offering cash rewards for violence crosses all acceptable boundaries.

“No elected representative should ever incentivize attacks on any citizen based on their faith,” Lal told



Morning Star News. “Such statements not only endanger lives but undermine the very principles our nation was founded upon. We appeal for decisive action to ensure this rhetoric does not translate into actual violence.”

Raphael D’Souza, former president of the Bombay Catholic Sabha, criticized the state government’s silence on the issue.

“The biggest concern is the lack of response – even when one of their own sitting MLAs, Gopichand Padalkar, reportedly said, ‘Attack these Christians; I will give you three lakh rupees,’” D’Souza told Catholic Connect. “Despite the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly being in session, no action has been taken against him.”

He defended the Christian community’s contributions to Indian society. “We are a peace-loving community that has played a vital role in education, healthcare and social services,” he said. “These accusations of forced conversions are completely baseless. There isn’t even an iota of proof – only unfounded allegations.”

Archbishop Elias Gonsalves of Nagpur called the MLA’s announcement “regrettable,” telling Crux, “We are against forced conversions. India is a democratic institution with secular credentials and constitutional guarantees.”

Melwyn Fernandes, Secretary of the Association of Concerned Christians, described the statement as “a direct attack on the very fabric of our secular democracy.

It is shocking and disheartening that our elected leaders have failed to take cognizance of such dangerous rhetoric, thereby undermining and isolating Christians in their own country.”

BJP Distances Itself

Facing mounting criticism, the BJP attempted to distance itself from Padalkar’s statements.

Agnelo Fernandes, general secretary of the Mumbai BJP and a Christian, called the remarks “highly irresponsible” and “dangerous.”

“We strongly disassociate ourselves from Mr. Padalkar’s statement,” Fernandes said in a public statement. “The remarks made by Padalkar were his personal views and do not reflect the official position of the party.”

Fernandes, who represents the party’s Minority Morcha (front), added, “As a Christian myself and representative of the Minority Morcha, I can say with conviction that the Christian community in India does not support forced religious conversions.” He acknowledged that “there may be a few individuals or fringe groups acting for personal gain” but emphasized it was “both unfair and dangerous to paint the entire community with the same brush.”

Fernandes asked Padalkar to engage with the Christian community to better understand their values and contributions.

Growing Pattern of Persecution

Earlier on July 9, Maharashtra’s Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule had announced that the state government would introduce legislation to prevent religious conversions and ordered investigations into what he called “unauthorized churches” in tribal areas.

The Archdiocese of Bombay expressed “deep concern” over Bawankule’s proposal for strict anti-conversion legislation, arguing that such laws risk fostering division and targeting vulnerable communities.

Christians constitute less than 1 percent of Maharashtra’s population, though significant communities exist in Mumbai and other urban centers. The state has witnessed increasing incidents of harassment and violence against Christian communities in recent years.

Religious rights advocates point to the hostile tone of the National Democratic Alliance government, led by the Hindu nationalist BJP, which they say has emboldened Hindu extremists across India since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took power in May 2014.

Christian support organization Open Doors ranked India 11th on its 2025 World Watch List of countries where Christians face the most severe persecution. The country stood at 31st place in 2013 but has steadily fallen in the rankings during Modi’s tenure as prime minister.

Source: Christian Daily

National Dalit round table conference ends with 42-point declaration

The first-ever National Dalit Round Table Conference concluded on 13th July 2025, with a 42-point declaration demanding justice, equality and structural reform to address caste-based discrimination. The conference, which saw over 250 participants, was inaugurated by Haribhakta Mijar and Deepak Malik Dom, both of whom are victims of caste-based violence. Mijar is the father of Ajit Mijar, who was allegedly killed for marrying an 'upper-caste woman'. His body still lies at the Teaching Hospital morgue in Kathmandu, awaiting justice.

Dom is a resident of Aurahi, Siraha, displaced after his home was



destroyed for a Mahayagya (grand Hindu sacrificial ritual). The event focused on 13 key topics related to Dalits, including debates over the term 'Dalit' itself. Other topics included constitutional amendments, land reform, electoral system, federalism, access to health and education, inter-Dalit discrimination, Dalit women's issues and views on religion. Following an extensive three-day discussion, the conference adopted the 42-point National Dalit Declaration.

One of the key demands in the declaration is that all Dalits who were murdered during various historical periods under feudal state protection must be declared martyrs and granted legal recognition by the state.

Another major highlight of the conference was the discussion over whether or not to use the term 'Dalit'. The activists and experts at the conference rejected the narrative that Dalits are 'Shudras', the lowest caste in the Hindu hierarchy and refuted claims that Dalits are 'untouchable' because of this label.

The declaration based on the discussion objects to the distortion and disrespect of the word 'Dalit'. It notes that the term 'Dalit' signifies a rebellious and socially conscious class, akin to the proletariat used by communist parties, not an 'untouchable' class as defined and promoted by ruling castes and casteist forces.

"Merely changing the terminology will not bring sustainable dignity or livelihoods for the Dalit community," said Nirmal Bishwakarma, former ambassador to South Africa and the chief convener of the conference.

"So we affirm the commitment to retain the term Dalit and advance the struggle for Dalit unity and liberation under that name." Call for the establishment of Ministries of Social Justice or Dalit Development at both federal and provincial levels is another point in the declaration. "Caste-based discrimination and untouchability are the problems of the nation, so there is a need for joint efforts of Dalits and non-Dalits to end it," said Homraj Acharya, a social justice activist. The disparities and divisions within the Dalit community were also brought forth. "We should end the discrimination and hierarchical differences within the Dalit community itself for an integrated Dalit movement," added Nirmala Pariyar, a Dalit rights activist.

Forming a 21-member committee, the organisers announced the launch of a new nationwide campaign, the 'Dalit campaign for social justice'. The committee will hold regular round table meetings with religious priests, political parties, government officials and leaders to push the agenda of declaration and social justice forward. "The Dalit movement should remain above political parties and not be confined within party lines," added Tara Singh BK, a political activist.

Source: Kathmandu Post



Samiti urge Dalits to register their religion as Buddhist in the upcoming Socio-Educational survey

Akhil Karnataka Buddha Dakhalaathi Andolana Samiti of district unit-a consortium of Dalit Organisations, has urged the followers of B.R. Ambedkar to mark "Buddhism" as their religion while mentioning their respective castes in the caste column in the Socio-Economic survey by Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission to begin on September 22.

Samiti members Devendra Hegde, Mariyappa Halli and Arjun Bhadre addressing presspersons in Kalaburagi city claimed that one does not face difficulties in enjoying reservation benefits by mentioning Buddhism as their religion.

According to the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Act, 1990, the members of Scheduled Castes who converted to Buddhism would continue to be recognised as Scheduled Castes and remain eligible for reservation benefits.

Mr. Hedge said that Buddhism was not only a religion but a powerful force that could eliminate inequality inherent in the caste system.

Members of the Karnataka State Scheduled Castes Right Communities Forum during a meeting held on September 18 at Bengaluru have resolved that people belonging to the 'Right Communities' to mention Buddhism as their religion followed by their respective castes in the caste column during the survey, Mr. Bhadre added.

Source: The Hindu



Ambedkar Society for South Asia