

QUARTERLY

AMBEDKAR VISION

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43 Deaths in Sewers & Septic
Tanks in **6 Months** But Govt and
Budget **Silent** on it




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 

In this edition of Ambedkar Vision, we confront a troubling array of injustices plaguing South Asia today—issues that reflect deep-rooted biases, systemic neglect and all too often a complete disregard for human rights. From caste-based oppression and religious persecution to the ongoing economic plight of marginalized communities, these stories echo the voices of those who continue to be denied their rightful place in society. It is shocking that 43 individuals have lost their lives in sewers and septic tanks over just six months. This grim reality, underscored by Indian government silence and a lack of budgetary allocation, highlights how the stigma of caste persists through life-threatening jobs relegated to the most marginalized. These are lives treated as disposable, communities forced to work in deadly conditions with no safety or dignity. This is a failure not only of government policy but of our collective humanity. Religious minorities in India and Bangladesh find themselves increasingly vulnerable, facing daily discrimination and acts of violence. In Bangladesh, Hindus live in fear, targeted precisely because they are minorities. A joint letter to the U.S. State Department, 300 religious leaders have called for the international community to address the growing religious persecution in India. This call comes in the wake of rising violence against religious minorities, particularly Muslims, Christians, and Dalits, who face discriminatory policies and violent attacks. While India prides itself on its secular Constitution, the reality on the ground paints a different picture, one where religious intolerance seems to be escalating. This growing concern is not only a challenge for the state but for the world. This year, both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have amplified the global call for India to address its human rights record, urging the European Union to act. While international pressure is necessary, it alone cannot bring about change. True transformation must arise from a concerted push within India, led by activists and civil society voices that courageously challenge these abuses and demand accountability. As these organizations continue to shine a light on oppression, the role of local advocates remains central. The past months have seen a rise in violent incidents targeting Dalits, a reality that we cannot ignore. From brutal attacks to systemic discrimination, the Dalit community has faced assaults on its very right to exist in peace. This escalation serves as a tragic reminder that caste oppression is alive and deeply ingrained in society. It is a stain on our conscience that demands both awareness and action. As we read through these stories of struggle and resilience, let us remember that the fight for justice and dignity is a shared responsibility. Whether it's caste discrimination, religious persecution, or the economic marginalization of entire communities, these injustices cannot be addressed in isolation. It is through unity, relentless advocacy, and an unwavering commitment to human rights that we can hope to create a world that Dr. Ambedkar envisioned—a world where every individual, regardless of caste, creed, or faith, is afforded the dignity they deserve.

UN HR body concerned over violence against minorities in India

Mateen Haider

The United Nations Human Rights Committee has published a series of critical findings about India after reviewing the country's record during its latest session in Geneva.

The committee, which comprises 18 independent experts monitoring implementation of the international covenant on civil & political rights (ICCPR), adopted concluding observations about India on 22 July after holding hearings earlier in the month.

In its findings, the Committee voiced concern about discrimination and violence against minority groups, including religious minorities, such as Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, “scheduled castes” and “scheduled tribes” and LGBT people.

The Committee called on India to adopt comprehensive laws banning discrimination, raise awareness among the public and provide training to civil servants, law enforcement officers, the judiciary and community leaders to promote respect for diversity. The Committee expressed concern that some provisions of India's Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts and counter-terrorism laws are not in compliance with the ICCPR.

It also voiced concern over the application of counter-terrorism laws for decades in “disturbed areas”, such as districts in Manipur, Jammu and Kashmir and Assam, which it said has led to widespread and grave human rights violations, including excessive use of force leading to unlawful killings, prolonged arbitrary detention, sexual violence, forced displacement and torture.

The Committee urged India to comply with its obligations under the ICCPR and to ensure that any counter-terrorism and other security measures in the so-called disturbed areas are temporary, proportionate, strictly necessary and subject to judicial review. It also asked India to establish a mechanism to initiate a process to acknowledge responsibility and ascertain the truth regarding human rights violations in disturbed areas.



India was one of the seven countries reviewed by the Committee during the latest session. The others were Croatia, Honduras, Maldives, Malta, Suriname and Syria. The Committee will hold its next session from 14 October to 8 November 2024 to review the reports of Ecuador, France, Greece, Iceland, Pakistan and Türkiye.

Source: Nation

43 Deaths in Sewers & Septic Tanks in 6 Months But Govt and Budget Silent on it

Bezwada Wilson



In just less than six months between two budgets of this year- Interim Budget before general elections on February 1, 2024 and Union Budget of the new innings of the Modi government on July 23, 2024, 43 sanitation workers have died in the country while cleaning the sewers and septic tanks. Despite this, neither manual scavenging, nor sewer deaths get even a single cursory mention in the Union Budget 2024.

Such deaths are not just the gross violation of human rights; they also violate the various Supreme Court orders on Prevention of Manual Scavenging. Besides, since each and every person involved in this work and henceforth dying in the pits belong to Dalit community, these deaths are also clear-cut violation of Prevention of Atrocities Act, as well as they also tantamount to untouchability, which is illegal in India. But ironically, the Government of India is hardly concerned with any of these facts.

Deaths of Sanitation Workers in sewers and septic tanks is an ongoing human right crisis in India, but the government has been continuously in denial mode. Government has no system in place to track such deaths comprehensively. Every time there is any such incident, the first reaction from the government is to disguise it as an accidental death.

The apathy on part of the government towards deaths of Safai Karmacharis is reflected by the fact that it does not even accepts the definition of manual scavenger' as mentioned in the Act passed by Parliament of India. Since, government simply denies the existence of practice of manual cleaning of

sewers and septic tanks, it blatantly refuses to recognise these deaths under the Act.

This is in complete defiance of the Supreme Court judgment regarding compensation and other benefits to kin of the persons who die in sewers and septic tanks. Government needs to accept that these deaths are not just because of occupational hazards. These are a heinous crime against Dalit sanitation workers. Such deaths have to be prevented.

Many reports have emerged highlighting the tragic deaths of manual scavengers who continue to risk their lives while cleaning sewers and septic tanks. Despite numerous calls for reform and the implementation of laws aimed at eradicating this hazardous practice, the government's negligence remains glaringly apparent. There is little evidence of substantive action taken to prevent such future occurrences. Furthermore, government has failed to regulate local-authorities, which are continuously failing to provide necessary safety equipment or training For those involved in such cleaning for emergencies. The absence of robust policies reflects a broader societal indifference towards issues affecting marginalized communities in India.

It is important to hold the government accountable for its failure to protect lives of these Dalit sanitation workers. We demand from the government to recognize these deaths and ask authentics not so tamper with any data or fact related to these deaths.

Source: themooknayak.com

300 religious leaders call on State Department to address religious persecution in India

Gina Christian



Catholic bishop in Chicago from an Eastern church whose origins go back to St. Thomas the Apostle has joined some 300 faith leaders in sounding an alarm over religious persecution in India.

Bishop Joy Alappatt of the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Eparchy of Chicago is among more than 300 signatories of an open letter to the U.S. State Department, asking Secretary Antony Blinken to designate India as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, due to significant violations of religious freedoms against Christians, Muslims, Dalits and Indigenous peoples.

Such designations are made under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, which requires the president to review the status of religious freedom in each of the world's nations and to flag those whose governments engage in or tolerate particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Torture, prolonged detention without charges, forced disappearances or other flagrant denials of life, liberty and security all trigger the CPC designation. Nations that meet some but not all criteria are placed on a special watch list under the 2016 Wolf Act. The secretary of state is delegated by the president to make the applicable designations.

News of the open letter was announced Aug. 1 in a press release issued by the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations. Based in Washington, the nonprofit FIACONA advocates on behalf of some 1 million Indian American Christians across the U.S. and Canada, while working to reduce violence against Christians in India.

The letter, according to FIACONA's news release, is the first "produced by U.S. Christian leaders addressing religious persecution in India," and was endorsed by "18 bishops, three archbishops and 167 clergy from diverse denominational and non-denominational backgrounds, eight current or former presidents and deans from five theological schools and leaders from over 40 Christian organizations."

Along with Alappatt, Catholics endorsing the letter include Paulist Father James Michael DiLuzio, executive director of ecumenical and multifaith relations for that congregation, as well as several Indian and Indian American Catholic clergy and lay leaders based in the U.S. and India.

The letter warned of "rapidly escalating state-sanctioned violations of human rights directed at religious minorities." Under the current Bharatiya Janata Party government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi — prior to whom there were "significant but sporadic incidents of persecution" targeting Christians and religious minorities — the "situation has radically changed for the worse," said the signatories.

The signatories noted that India is currently ranked at No. 11 on the World Watch List of Open Doors International, a global advocacy organization for persecuted Christians. The majority of the nation's 1.4 billion residents (close to 72%) are Hindu, with Muslims (about 15%), Christians (5%) and ethno-religionists (3.7%) representing the remaining quarter of the population.

In its 2024 list, Open Doors — whose 2023 report was cited by the State Department in its annual



religious freedom assessment of India — found that "the rights of all categories of Christian communities are violated in India, since Hindutva radicals," who seek to create a Hindu nationalist state, "view them all as alien to the nation.

"They want to cleanse their country of Islam and Christianity and do not shy away from using extensive violence to achieve this," said Open Doors, noting that Hindu converts to Christianity bear "the brunt of persecution in India," and "are often physically assaulted and sometimes killed."

The FIACONA letter also cited the ecumenical Delhi-based United Christian Forum, which reported 720 attacks against Christians in 2023, a dramatic rise from 127 in 2014 when Modi first assumed office.

FIACONA says it documented 1,570 attacks in 2023, up from its previous report of 1,198 in 2022.

In addition, the letter pointed to India's ranking as the third worst "persecutor of the year" in 2023 by the Washington-based nonprofit International Christian Concern.


In a separate Aug. 1 press release, ICC announced that lawmakers in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, had passed a bill July 30 increasing punishments for violators of a 2021 anti-conversion law. ICC said the move will "make easy targets of Christian missionary groups."

Despite the data, however, "persecution of religious minorities is being buried by U.S. adoration of the current Indian regime," said the Rev. Neal Christie of the United Methodist Church, FIACONA's executive director, in the news release.

"This letter is a clarion call to the American church to stay alert to abuses caused by religious nationalism in what was a pluralistic and secular India," said the Rev. Peter Cook, executive director of the New York State Council of Churches and FIACONA board member, in the news release. "We hope it will inspire the U.S. government to stop ignoring how Modi's Hindu nationalist BJP systematically implements a religious nationalist agenda in both India and America."

OSV News has contacted the Indian Embassy in Washington for comment but did not receive an immediate response.

Source: NCR Online



Minorities are an explosive force which, if it erupts, can blow up the whole fabric of the State.

Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Hindus in Bangladesh shiver amid attacks: Soft targets, hard facts

Yudhajit Shankar Das

In the three days of chaos and anarchy that descended upon Bangladesh on August 5 after Sheikh Hasina resigned as the Prime Minister and escaped a mob baying for her blood, there have been over 200 instances of targeted attacks on Hindus. Five Hindus have been killed and there have been several cases of sexual assault. Hindus have historically been a soft target in Muslim-majority Bangladesh but the violence this time is exceptional in scale and the fact that it might be difficult to bring the guilty to book.

For at least three days, there were no law-enforcement personnel in Bangladesh. Police personnel are still not reporting to duty after angry mobs lynched dozens of cops in several districts. This was a window of opportunity for those who wanted to direct their hatred towards Hindus.

"Communal sentiments have always been present in Bangladesh. There are people who look for an opportunity to attack minorities, especially Hindus. Even during the Awami League regime, there were attacks on Hindus. Communalism is a hard fact of Bangladeshi society," Anupam Debashis Roy, Bangladeshi author and activist, tells IndiaToday.In.

Some might argue that it is difficult to separate the political from the communal in the recent violence, as the targets have been Hasina's Awami League members and police personnel. However, the attacks on temples, targeted looting of shops owned by Hindus and encroaching of their properties show that some of the violence was directed particularly on religious lines.

At least three of the five Hindus who were killed had nothing obvious to do with politics or the police force. Mrinal Kanti Chakraborty, a schoolteacher in Rakhalgachi, was hacked to death and his wife and daughter grievously injured.

Dhaka-based Anupam Roy says he knows several victims who had nothing to do with politics. He attributes these attacks to "Hindu hatred".

There have been 205 instances of attacks on Hindus in



Bangladesh in the three-day period from August 5 to 8, according to a list compiled by the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council.

To be clear, these aren't just 205 places targeted. In dozens of these instances, multiple houses and shops have been targeted, which means there are hundreds of cases of attacks and not just 205.

In several instances, the prime targets have been Iskcon or Durga temples. In Dinajpur district, a crematorium has been encroached by miscreants.

Most of the targeted attacks have been assault, arson and looting, with encroaching upon properties being one of the primary objectives.

However, one needs to be cautious of fake videos and images being spread on social media. Also, one can't jump to a conclusion as to if any outfit or political party is behind those attacks, without thorough investigation. And that is what the Hindus of Bangladesh are demanding.

THE HISTORY OF VIOLENCE AGAINST HINDUS IN BANGLADESH

"Bangladesh has a decades-long history of low-intensity communal tensions and opportunistic economic subjugation of Hindus. Land grabs of the poor Hindu people is the most common form of discrimination," Shafquat Rabbee, a Bangladeshi-American political analyst, tells IndiaToday.In.

The continuous subjugation of the minorities in Bangladesh is reflected in the sharp dip in the population of Hindus in Bangladesh.

The share of Hindus in Bangladesh's population dipped from 22% in 1951 to around 8% in 2022. Meanwhile, the share of Muslims in the population mix rose to over 91% from 76% in 1951.

"Rural Hindus are the most likely on the receiving end of such victimisation, resulting in continuous migration and asset transfers out of Bangladesh into India over the last

many decades, under all sorts of political regimes," says Rabbee, faculty member at University of Dallas.

Between 1964 and 2013, over 11 million Hindus fled Bangladesh due to religious persecution, according to the Hindu American Foundation. It says 230,000 Hindus continue to leave the country every year.

Rabbee is right when he says that it is Hindus, mostly in rural areas, who bear the major brunt of these attacks. Even in these three days of chaos and madness, most of the attacks on Hindus have taken place in rural areas, though those in cities haven't really been left untouched.

Chattogram saw the highest instances of attacks at 16. Khulna, Jessore, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat and Magura are among the districts that saw a large number of attacks against Hindus.

NO POLITICAL PARTY FOR HINDUS IN BANGLADESH

Ahead of the 2024 election, Sheikh Hasina, portrayed as a secular leader and painted pro-Hindu by her rivals, wooed the Islamist Hefazat-e-Islam among other radical outfits.

Hindus are considered to be mostly Awami League voters, though there is a chunk of the community that is also loyal to Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

"Hindus in Bangladesh believe that if there is any unrest, they become the first to be attacked," says author-activist Anupam Roy.

"After the 2018 election, a Hindu woman was gang-raped because she voted for the BNP. In 2016, when the Awami League was in power, the Nasirnagar attacks took place and that was led by an Awami League leader," says Roy.

In the Nasirnagar attacks, truckloads of Muslim zealots destroyed 300 houses and left 100 Hindus injured over a post seemingly critical of Islam.

"During the 2001-2006 BNP-Jamaat regime, there was heavy-handedness against Hindus. So, there is no party to protect Hindus in Bangladesh," adds Roy.

POLITICS-COMMUNAL OVERLAP IN BANGLADESH, SAYS EXPERT

There is a strong correlation in an increased amount of violence against Hindus during volatile political situations, say experts. Political analyst Rabbee says this warrants a study of how many of these incidents are political and how many are "truly communal".

Rabbee says that a rough breakdown of political allegiance in Bangladesh would indicate that about 40% of Bangladeshis are supporters of the Awami League, 40% support the BNP and the remaining 20% back the Jamaat-E-Islami, Jatiya Party and other Islamic and Communist parties.

"If you look at Bangladesh's demography, there are roughly about 10% Hindus and anecdotal evidence suggests a very large percentage of them are Awami League supporters," says Rabbee.

"Which means, close to 25% of the Awami League's support base are Hindus and the Hindu community has the highest representation in political leadership roles in the Awami League. Over the last 15 years of Sheikh Hasina's dictatorship, there were opportunists from both Muslim and Hindu communities who proved their allegiance to the dictator by taking part in violent suppression of dissent," he says.

He says when the Awami League faced street protests, "the violence that ensued statistically encapsulates a good number of Hindu politicians and supporters, just like it engulfed the Muslim Awami Leaguers".

"Amid such violent chaos, what portion of these incidents are political revenge attacks and what portion are inherently communal is something that we need to figure out — not to say any of it is justified at all," adds Rabbee.

Dhaka-based Anupam Roy says there have been several narratives about the recent attacks and there is no doubt that innocent minorities have been targeted too.

"There is a political aspect to the recent attacks on minorities, but there are several apolitical Hindus who have been attacked. I know several of those victims personally. These attacks have taken place because of Hindu hatred," says Roy.

Some say Hindus are shivering and are scared to even open the doors to their home.

"Hindus are shivering. They are not opening their doors without confirming who is knocking. Hindu minorities, from the Dhaka capital to the remote villages, are very scared," Kajal Debnath, vice-president of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, told Associated Press.

Hundreds of Bangladeshis have reportedly reached the Indo-Bangla border in a likely bid to cross over to India.

But Rabbee adds that things are further complicated by viral misinformation on social media.

ATTACKS ON HINDUS IN BANGLADESH AND FAKE VIDEOS

It is true that there have been large-scale attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh in the post-Hasina phase. It is also true that there has been a flood of fake videos and images claiming to be attacks on Hindus.

These also make the process of justice complicated and also help by arming the naysayers. The AFP fact-check unit in Dhaka has called out several such videos. Journalist Quadrudin Shishir, who works for AFP's fact-check unit, says there is no denying the fact that there have been several attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh. However, he says, social media has helped spread false information too.

Shishir has debunked 20 such fake videos on his social media handles.

"I have found no authentic video till now of rape and murder of Hindus in Bangladesh in the recent post-Hasina scenario. I have debunked 20 such fake images and videos that claimed to be attacks on Hindus. I am working on 20 more such videos," he tells IndiaToday.In.

Shishir gives the example of two such videos that went viral in India.

"A video claiming to be of the stoning of a Hindu man swimming in a pond to save his life was actually of a Muslim Awami League leader. Another video, claiming to be a Hindu student being harassed and made to do sit-ups was that of a Muslim Chhatra League activist," says Shishir. The Chhatra League is the students' wing of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League.

"This kind of false information is being spread by mostly Indian X handles and Facebook pages. There are a few Bangladeshi handles too behind such content," says Shishir.

Amid the fake videos of attacks, images of Muslims guarding temples and other Hindu properties have also been shared on social media.

However, the over 200 instances, in dozens where multiple Hindu sites and people were targeted, show how their vigil wasn't enough and that society could have done much better.

BANGLADESH HINDUS DEMAND JUSTICE, ASSURANCE OF SAFETY

On August 10 and 11, lakhs of Hindus took to the streets of Dhaka to protest against the targeted attacks on them. They demanded protection and those behind the attacks

be brought to book.

The head of the military-backed interim government in Bangladesh and Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus visited the historic Dhakeshwari Temple in Dhaka on Tuesday. This was meant to be an act of assurance.

"We are one family. We want to build a Bangladesh that is united. There is no question of any discrimination on the basis of religion. Our only identity is that of a Bangladeshi," Yunus stated.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his congratulatory message to Yunus for his role as the head of the interim government also mentioned that Hindus in Bangladesh need to be protected.

On August 12, Bangladesh's new Home Affairs Adviser, Sakhawat Hussain, apologised to the community for not being able to adequately protect them.

Addressing the distressed Hindu community, Muhammad Yunus urged them for patience before passing judgement on his interim government's role in the ongoing crisis.

"The new government has vowed that there would be no attacks on Hindus, but we need to see how far this translates into action," author-activist Anupam Roy tells IndiaToday.In.

"I expect the new government to stay true to its promises, to form an independent commission to bring the guilty to book, compensate the victims and punish the guilty so that these attacks never take place," he adds.

A thorough probe is also needed because there are allegations that some Awami League leaders have plotted attacks on minorities for sensationalism and to show the deterioration in the scene after the fall of Hasina.

"There is immense political incentive for both the current Yunus government and the BNP to keep the Bangladeshi Hindus safe. On the other hand, there is tremendous political advantage for the Awami League to label any attack on any Hindu person under the last few weeks' lawlessness as communal violence," says Bangladeshi-American analyst Rabbee.

Dhaka-based author-activist Roy says "We need proper investigation to find out the truth." With police personnel and law enforcement officials still away from duty and time running out to collect evidence, justice for Hindus in Bangladesh could be a far cry.

Source: India Today

HRW and Amnesty International push EU to urge India to end human rights abuses

Nicole D'Souza

Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International called for the European Union (EU) to urge the government of India to end human rights abuses in a joint statement released, ahead of the EU-India Human Rights Dialogue.

HRW and Amnesty International, alongside Front Line Defenders, the World Organisation Against Torture and Christian Solidarity Worldwide, called for the EU to “ensure public oversight and accountability” for their India policy. The statement included a series of priority recommendations for the EU to urge the Indian government to address human rights violations.

The recommendations included calling for the immediate release of “all arbitrarily detained human rights defenders and journalists” and repealing or amending “repressive laws used to target minorities” and “silence dissent.” It addressed the Indian government's abuse of foreign funding laws to target nongovernmental organizations. The statement petitioned the EU to press the Indian government to publicly condemn and prosecute those responsible for attacks on religious minorities and take decisive action in deterring state governments from carrying out the “arbitrary and collective punishment of minority communities.” It also advocated for granting access to be granted to “all United Nations independent experts and international human rights monitoring mechanisms, including in Jammu and Kashmir and Manipur.”

The statement addressed the discrimination minority communities in India have faced in the decade Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been in office. Criticizing laws the Modi administration has enacted, the organizations denounced the violence minority groups have been subject to through systematically discriminatory

policies. Of particular concern were the exclusion of Muslim asylum seekers through the Citizenship Amendment Act and a lack of due process, which has allowed BJP state governments to discriminate against Muslims. Condemning statements made by Modi and other BJP leaders as “inciting hostility and violence against marginalized groups,” the joint statement noted such speeches “have normalized abuses against Muslims, Christians and others.”

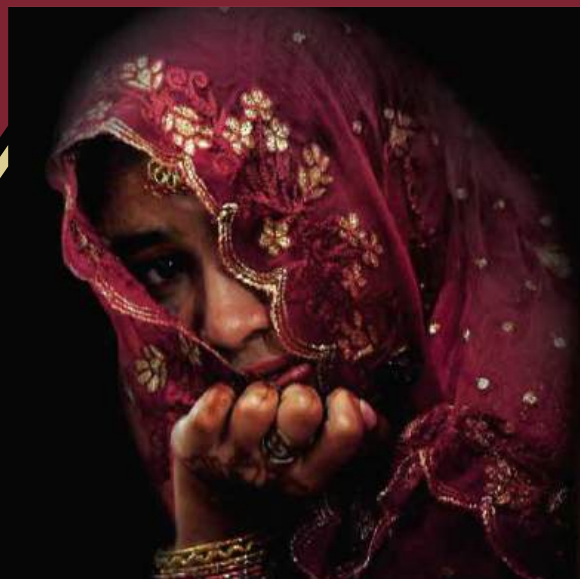
Pointing to the expansion of police powers granted through the new Code of Criminal Procedure and the amendments to the Information Technology Rules, the statement expresses concerns that such laws are “being used to infringe upon the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and fair trial,” and additionally “seriously undermine media freedoms, rights to privacy and freedom of expression online.” It noted the disproportionate effect restrictive internet policies have on impoverished communities relying on the government's social protection measures.

During last year's visit to the US, Modi, when prompted to address concerns raised by human rights groups said, “regardless of caste, creed, religion, gender—there is absolutely no space for any discrimination.” India dismissed the US State Department's critical human rights report on the country as “deeply biased” and “reflecting a very poor understanding of India.” Ahead of India's 2024 election, UN human rights experts called on the country to “implement its human rights obligations fully” by “reversing the erosion of human rights and addressing recurring concerns raised by UN human rights mechanisms.”

Source: Jurist



Legal age for Christian marriage at 18: a step forward to protect girls and abandon child marriage



The updating of the law on Christian marriage in Pakistan is an important step forward to protect girls from early marriages, says Kamran Michael, Christian politician and former senator, who in recent years has promoted before institutions to protect the rights of minors and the most vulnerable people. On July 9, with a measure that received wide approval in both the political and ecclesiastical communities of Pakistan, the National Assembly of this country raised to 18 years the legal age of marriage for boys and girls belonging to the Christian community, thus adapting the provisions on Christian marriage to Pakistani standards regarding the protection of minors. The bill titled "Christian Marriage Amendment Act, 2024" was introduced by a Christian member of the National Assembly, Naveed Amir Jeeva, with the aim of updating the Christian Marriage Act, 1872, which previously fixed the age of marriage at 16 years for boys and 13 for girls. It was the Christian politician Kamran Michael, a senator in the last legislature, who first proposed the amendment in the Senate in January 2023, pointing out that raising the age of marriage was essential to protect girls from sexual abuse and forced conversions. "The State has the duty to protect children from exploitation and defend their rights," he stated, expressing his satisfaction with the approval of the law, which, after being approved by both chambers (the Senate had approved it in February 2024), now awaits the President's signature to become a full law and come into force. The amendment to the law is also intended to guarantee the protection of the fundamental rights of children, in particular the right to education and health, he stressed, welcoming the approval of the Churches of all denominations in Pakistan. "The amendment will help prevent forced marriages of underage Christian girls," said Bishop Azad Marshall, President of the Anglican Church of Pakistan and the National Council of Churches of Pakistan, with satisfaction. "The progress is significant because it paves the way for possible action on related issues, such as forced conversions of underage girls and the misuse of blasphemy laws," he added, calling on all Christian Churches in the nation to create a joint group to report to Parliament on issues important to the life and security of the nation's Christian faith communities. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, through its National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), has also welcomed the amendment: Bishop Samson Shukardin,

National Director of the Commission and Father Bernard Emmanuel, Executive Director, expressing their "sincere appreciation to the entire Parliament", have declared that "this is a request that the Christian community has been making for some time" and it is a "crucial provision to protect our underage girls", hoping that "the government will take new measures to criminalize forced religious conversions", in order to protect non-Muslim citizens, such as the Hindu and Christian communities, who face problems in this regard. The phenomenon, in fact, is related to that of the kidnapping and forced conversions of Christian and Hindu girls to Islam, since Sharia (Islamic law) allows girls who reach puberty to be considered "adults" and therefore the possible age of marriage. Last April, a team of United Nations experts called on Pakistan to pass legislative measures to protect the vulnerability of women and girls belonging to minority faiths, especially with regard to forced marriages and forced religious conversions, requesting Pakistan to raise the legal age of marriage for girls to 18, as a deterrent measure. The experts noted that forced marriages and religious conversions of girls belonging to minority faiths have been "validated by the courts", but "child, early and forced marriages cannot be justified on religious or cultural grounds", underlining the need for provisions "intended to invalidate, annul or dissolve marriages contracted under duress." The UN working group consisted of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, Nazila Ghanea; the special rapporteur on minority issues, Nicolas Levrat; the special rapporteur on human trafficking, Siobhan Mullally; and the special rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Tomoya Obokata. According to data from civil society organizations, around 1,000 underage Christian or Hindu girls are kidnapped each year in Pakistan, forcibly converted and married to their kidnappers.

Source: Fides

The alarming rise of anti-Dalit violence and discrimination in India: A series of gruesome incidents since July 2024



India has long struggled with deep-rooted caste-based discrimination that permeates into various aspects of society. Despite constitutional safeguards and legal protections, Dalits in India continue to face systemic violence, discrimination and social exclusion. Recent incidents across the country highlight a grim reality where Dalit lives are often undervalued, leading to a surge in brutal attacks, social boycotts and caste-based atrocities.

This report chronicles a disturbing series of anti-Dalit incidents that have occurred since July, shedding light on the pervasive nature of caste-based violence in contemporary India. These incidents, spanning from the southern state of Karnataka to the northern territories of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, as well as eastern states like Bihar, reveal a grim pattern of violence and systemic oppression against individuals from the Dalit community. Victims range from children to the elderly, showing that no age group is spared from the cruelty rooted in caste prejudice. The atrocities include not only physical violence but also psychological torture, sexual assault and social exclusion, underscoring the pervasive and multi-faceted nature of caste-based discrimination in contemporary India.

CJP is dedicated to finding and bringing to light instances of Hate Speech, so that the bigots propagating these venomous ideas can be unmasked and brought to justice. From Karnataka, in the southern part of the country, three incidents of murder and assault have highlighted the continuing dangers faced by Dalits even in everyday situations. The cases of a young Dalit woman poisoned to death following an inter-caste marriage and an elderly Dalit man beaten for seeking shelter during a rainstorm starkly illustrate the lethal consequences of caste hatred.

In the north, Uttar Pradesh has once again proven to be a hotbed of caste-based violence. The incidents there range from the rape of a minor Dalit girl, whose pleas for justice were ignored by the police, to the horrific act of forcing a Dalit boy to drink urine as a form of punishment. These crimes highlight a culture of impunity where caste-based violence is often dismissed or inadequately addressed by the authorities.

In Uttarakhand, Dalit families have been subjected to a

social boycott, effectively cutting them off from essential resources, simply for failing to participate in a religious event due to illness. This act of collective punishment, sanctioned by the local panchayat, demonstrates the extent to which caste hierarchies are enforced in rural India, where non-compliance with oppressive traditions can lead to severe and life-threatening consequences.

In Bihar, the rape of a Dalit girl and the subsequent threats made by police to her family reveal a disturbing collusion between perpetrators and law enforcement. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, the torture of a Dalit man by police officers, who allegedly used casteist slurs and inflicted severe physical harm, points to the institutionalization of caste discrimination within the very systems meant to protect citizens.

These incidents, scattered across the diverse geographic and cultural landscape of India, reveal a grim reality: caste-based violence and discrimination continue to be a pervasive issue in the country. It is essential to be highlighted here that out of all the states from where these incidents have been reported, only the state of Karnataka is being governed by the Congress party, rest of the states are ruled by Bharatiya Janata Party and their allies. Despite legal protections and decades of social reform movements, Dalits remain vulnerable to extreme forms of violence and the perpetrators often act with impunity. This series of attacks, occurring within a period of two months, serves as a stark reminder that the fight against caste oppression is far from over and requires urgent, comprehensive action at both societal and governmental levels.

Caste-based murders and brutal assaults:

July 23, 2024: In a shocking incident of caste-based violence, a 15-year-old Dalit boy from Shravasti district, Uttar Pradesh, was forcibly made to drink urine by three upper-caste youths. As per the report of the Times of India, the incident occurred on July 23, 2024, when the victim, who works as a technician setting up sound mixers and audio systems for events, was on his way home after work. The trio, identified as Kishan Tiwari, Dilip Mishra and Satyam Tiwari, accosted the boy while in an inebriated state. According to the police, the incident was triggered by the

boy's family charging the accused extra for an audio system they had installed for a function. Enraged by this, Dilip Mishra urinated into a liquor bottle while Satyam and Kishan pinned the boy down, forcing the bottle into his mouth. The trio also thrashed the minor and filmed the entire incident, which later circulated on social media. The victim narrated the ordeal to his elder brother after reaching home, following which his family lodged a police complaint the next day. The police conducted a preliminary investigation and arrested the three accused based on eyewitness accounts and the viral video. SHO Mahimanath Upadhyay confirmed the arrests and stated that the incident stemmed from a prior dispute involving a DJ service run by the victim's family.

August 18, 2024: In Sanganal village, Yalaburga taluk of Karnataka's Koppal district, a 26-year-old Dalit man named Yamanurwamy Bandiha was brutally stabbed to death by a barber at a local salon. According to a report of the Observer Post, the incident unfolded when Yamanurwamy visited the salon for a haircut and the salon owner, Mudakappa Hadapad, demanded payment before the service. Despite assurances from Yamanurwamy, Mudakappa made incendiary remarks based on his caste, escalating the argument. In a fit of rage, Mudakappa stabbed Yamanurwamy with a pair of scissors. The victim was rushed to a government hospital, but unfortunately, he succumbed to his injuries. The Yalaburga police registered a case under Section 193 (murder) of the BNS and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, leading to the arrest of the accused. Local Dalits have demanded justice for the victim's family and the District Social Welfare Department has been informed to provide compensation.

September 3, 2024: In Vithalapura village of Gangavathi taluk, Karnataka, a 21-year-old Dalit woman named Mariamma from the Madiga community was allegedly poisoned to death following her inter-caste marriage. Mariamma had married Hanumayya, a youth from the Scheduled Tribe (ST) community, in April 2023 after a two-year relationship. However, her father has accused 13 members of Hanumayya's family of harassing Mariamma, subjecting her to severe caste-based discrimination and dowry demands. As per the report of the Observer Post, the father of the victim alleged that she was physically assaulted before being poisoned by her in-laws. Initially, her husband's family claimed she had ingested poison while working on the farm, but Mariamma's father suspected foul play and filed a complaint with the Gangavathi police. The authorities have arrested two individuals for questioning and a case has been registered. Mariamma's body has been sent for a post-mortem examination as investigations continue.

September 4, 2024: In a disturbing incident in Kokkada, Belthangady of Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada district, a 67-year-old Dalit elder named Mancha Mogera was viciously assaulted by a shopkeeper named Ramanna Gowda. The attack occurred when Mogera sought shelter from heavy rain and asked to rest near Gowda's shop. Instead of offering help, Gowda hurled casteist slurs at Mogera and

attacked him with a wooden pole, striking him on the head and back. Mogera was immediately rushed to Kokkada Government Hospital for first aid and later transferred to Belthangady Government Hospital for further treatment. The Dharmasthala police have recorded Mogera's statement and initiated an investigation into the incident.

Sexual Violence and Police Complicity:

August 30, 2024: In another chilling case from Bihar's Gaya district, a Dalit girl was raped by two men, Ranjit and Sachin, at her home. Despite the gravity of the crime, when the victim's family attempted to file an FIR, the police allegedly threatened them with imprisonment if they pursued the case.

September 2, 2024: The scourge of sexual violence against Dalit women remains rampant, with authorities often complicit in delaying justice. In Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki district, a 16-year-old Dalit girl was kidnapped and raped by a businessman's son. The victim was reportedly made to wait at the police station for over 10 hours, where officers pressured her into a compromise rather than taking swift action against the perpetrator.

Social Boycotts and Discrimination:

July 17, 2024: On the night of July 17, a 24-year-old Dalit youth named Ajay Parmar was violently assaulted by a group of upper-caste men in Sayebapur village, Himatnagar taluka, Sabarkantha district, North Gujarat. The incident allegedly stemmed from Parmar's Instagram profile picture, which featured him wearing a traditional headgear and sunglasses. According to the FIR filed on July 18, Parmar, who works as an auto rickshaw driver, was confronted by two men from the Darbar community, who identify themselves as Kshatriyas, near the Navanagar bus stand. The men reportedly objected to Parmar's display picture and demanded that he remove it. As per the report of Deccan Herald, the confrontation quickly escalated into physical violence as the men beat him. Parmar managed to escape and left his auto rickshaw behind. He was later informed by a friend that a group of 20-25 men from the Darbar community were waiting to attack him. Fearing for his life, Parmar called his father and brother for help. The group subsequently confronted Parmar and his family, slapping and abusing them. Despite calling the police, help arrived only after an hour. Parmar, the only Dalit resident in a village predominantly inhabited by the Darbar community, detailed the harassment and violence he endured. The FIR names four accused: Kirpalsinh Rathod, Manusinh Rathod, his son Hitendrasinh Rathod and Shukalsinh Rathod. Police Sub-Inspector Sanjay Goswami from the Himatnagar rural police station spoke to the Deccan Herald and confirmed that the accused have fled the village and that an investigation is underway.

July 18, 2024: In Subhai village of Chamoli district, Uttarakhand, Dalit families faced a severe social boycott after a member of their community, Pushkar Lal, could not attend a religious event due to illness. Traditionally, Dalit

families in the village are responsible for playing the drum at various social, cultural and religious festivals. Following Pushkar Lal's absence, the local panchayat announced a boycott against all Scheduled Caste (SC) families. As per the Observer Post, this boycott imposed harsh restrictions, barring them from using forest and water resources, buying essentials from shops, commuting in vehicles and even visiting temples. A video surfaced showing a panchayat member threatening villagers with similar consequences if they did not comply with the boycott order. In response, the affected families lodged a complaint at the Joshimath Police Station, specifically naming Ramkrishna Khandwal and Yashvir Singh as responsible for orchestrating the boycott.

August 17, 2024: In KV Kuppam taluk, Tamil Nadu's Vellore district, a Kaliyamman temple near Gemmankuppam village was demolished by a group of caste Hindus, following a dispute over the exclusion of Dalits from the temple's Aadi month festivities. As reported by the Observer Post, the dispute began when Dalits, who make up roughly 50% of the village population, were barred from participating in the festivities scheduled for August 2. Despite being under police protection, the temple was demolished using earthmovers and the idol was removed on August 6. The Dalits alleged that the demolition was supported by the then jurisdictional DSP Ravichandran, although the DSP denied these allegations, stating that the case had been handed over to the revenue department. The caste Hindus, including members of the Vanniyar, Yadav, Chettiar and Naidu communities, argued that the temple was built solely by a caste Hindu, D Loganathan, who claimed that Goddess Kaliyamman instructed him in a dream to exclude Dalits from the festivities. The demolition has sparked controversy and legal action, with Gudiyatham revenue officials scheduling peace committee meetings to address the issue.

Violence in Educational and Public Spaces:

July 21, 2024: Anish Kumar, a 24-year-old Dalit youth, was brutally attacked by an armed gang in Malagalu, Kanakapura, Karnataka, on July 21, 2024. The assailants severed Anish's left hand in a shocking act of violence. The attack stemmed from an argument between Anish and members of a different community earlier that day. The trouble began when a group of youths, including Anish, were standing near Javanammanadoddi Cheenarakuppe Circle and chatting. A group of upper-caste individuals passing by questioned the youths about their presence there, leading to a heated argument. Though the argument initially deescalated, the accused returned two hours later armed with lethal weapons and attacked Anish and others who were present. In the ensuing violence, several people, including three women, sustained severe injuries and were rushed to a hospital. Anish's left hand was severed during the attack. The police registered a case against the accused, identified as Harsha and six others, under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act. Additional police forces

were deployed in the area to prevent further violence and senior police officials visited the hospital to speak with the victims.

July 23, 2024: The violence extends to educational institutions, where Dalit students are subjected to humiliating and abusive treatment. In Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, a Dalit minor was brutally beaten by a schoolteacher after refusing to pluck fruits for the teacher.

July 24, 2024: Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has been engulfed in controversy following the discovery of objectionable graffiti at Kaveri Hostel. The slogans, which included "Chamar Quit India," "Dalit Quit India," "Brahmin-Bania Zindabad," and "Hindu-RSS Zindabad," have incited widespread protests and condemnation among the student body. Dhananjay, President of the JNU Students Union (JNUSU), strongly condemned the incident, emphasizing the university's commitment to equality and denouncing the divisive nature of the slogans. "We strongly oppose such divisive actions," he asserted. In response to the outcry, university officials have ordered the immediate removal of the graffiti and are taking steps to prevent future incidents. The administration is considering additional security measures, including the installation of CCTV cameras in the hostel to enhance surveillance and security.

July 25, 2024: A Dalit woman in Sikauhula village of Banda district, Uttar Pradesh, was allegedly assaulted and subjected to caste-based slurs by a farmer and his son on July 25, 2024. As per the Observer Post, the incident occurred when the 36-year-old woman, who works as an agricultural labourer, attempted to collect water from the family's tube well in Sikauhula village. The accused, Rajendra Singh and his son Jitendra Pratap Singh, reportedly objected to the woman using their tubewell and proceeded to assault her while hurling casteist slurs. The woman managed to escape and reported the incident to the local police station. An FIR was subsequently registered under various sections of the BNS and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Moni Nishad, the Station House Officer at Jaspura police station, confirmed that the accused had been identified but no arrests had been made at the time. The police are continuing their investigation into the incident.

July 29, 2024: A Dalit groom and several guests were attacked during a wedding in Madakarimupr village, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, after upper-caste men objected to the groom mounting a horse, a traditional practice. The incident took place under the jurisdiction of Khatauli Police Station. According to reports, the altercation began when the groom's party played "casteist" songs during the horse-mounting ceremony. However, the groom's side claims that the upper-caste individuals were responsible for the provocation. The attack on the groom and his guests was violent, with several people being injured. The situation quickly escalated and the police had to intervene to restore

order. An FIR was lodged against 15-20 men under various sections of the IPC and SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act. Local authorities have assured the Dalit community that strict action will be taken against those responsible. The incident has once again highlighted the deep-rooted caste-based discrimination and violence that persists in rural parts of India.

August 8, 2024: In another disturbing incident, a six-year-old Dalit child, a class one student, was reportedly forced to clean the school toilet by his teachers and later found locked in the school classroom after hours in Uttar Pradesh. As per the report of the Observer's Post, the child's mother filed a police complaint, alleging that the teachers, Principal Sandhya Jain and class teacher Ravita Rani, harboured prejudice against Dalit children, leading to repeated mistreatment of her son. When her son did not return home, she found him locked in the classroom after hearing his cries. Villagers and family members called the principal and the classroom was eventually unlocked by Rani's husband. The mother's allegations indicate a pattern of discrimination and neglect. In response, Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) Sandeep Kumar announced that Principal Sandhya Jain had been suspended and teacher Ravita Rani received an adverse entry in her service record. A two-member committee was appointed to investigate the incident, with a report expected within three days. The police are currently investigating the matter.

Brutal Attacks by Police:

July 20, 2024: Rishipal, a Dalit man from Bhawarki Jadid village in Uttar Pradesh, has alleged that he was brutally tortured by police officers at the Dakiya Chowki police station after a domestic dispute with his wife. According to Rishipal, the ordeal began when he had an argument with his wife on July 20, 2024. In response, she went to the local police station to file a complaint. Later that day, around 5 PM, two constables, Jaidev Singh and Amit Kumar, came to his house and took him to the police station. Rishipal claims that around 1 AM, the officers, allegedly under the influence of alcohol, began questioning him about his caste. They then proceeded to subject him to brutal beatings, using fists, kicks and sticks. He was reportedly injured in his private parts and fainted during the assault. When he regained consciousness, the officers forced him to massage their hands and feet throughout the night.

The following morning, Rishipal was released and returned home, where he showed his injuries to his wife. The incident quickly gained attention after a video of his injuries went viral on social media, sparking outrage within the Dalit community. In response to the protests, a case was filed against the two constables and they, along with the chowki in-charge, were suspended. Bhim Army District President Sunil Sagar and other activists condemned the incident, demanding strict action against the police officers involved. CO Sangam Kumar confirmed that a medical examination of Rishipal had been conducted and SP Vidya Sagar Mishra

assured that the suspended officers would face a thorough investigation.

July 21, 2024: Rohit Valmiki, a Dalit sanitary worker in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, alleged that he was beaten by police personnel after overtaking their official vehicles. While on his way home on a motorcycle, Valmiki overtook vehicles belonging to the police and electricity departments. Following this, he claimed that some policemen accused him of reckless driving, verbally abused him and took him to the police station where he was physically assaulted. Valmiki's brother corroborated his account, stating that Rohit was indeed taken to the police station and thrashed by the officers. In response to the allegations, Superintendent of Police Agam Jain announced that the Sub Divisional Officer of Police (SDOP) is conducting an investigation. Jain assured that strict action would be taken after the investigation is completed.

July 25, 2024: In a shocking incident, a Dalit mother and her minor son were brutally beaten by police officials inside the Katni GRP police station in Madhya Pradesh on July 25, 2024. The details of the incident were shared on social media, where the mother alleged that the police had physically assaulted her and her son within the police station premises. The incident has sparked outrage and calls for justice from various activists and members of the Dalit community. The reasons behind the assault have not been made clear, but the brutality of the act has led to widespread condemnation. The police have yet to release an official statement regarding the incident and demands for a thorough investigation are growing louder.

No equality and justice for Dalits?

The pervasive nature of these atrocities—ranging from brutal assaults and forced social boycotts to systemic abuse by law enforcement—reveals a grim reality where the promise of constitutional safeguards remains largely unfulfilled for marginalized communities. The horrific incidents reported across various states, including Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, reflect a deeply rooted social malaise that continues to undermine the dignity and rights of Dalits.

Addressing this crisis requires more than mere acknowledgment; it demands a proactive and sustained commitment to reform. Immediate measures should include rigorous enforcement laws, transparent investigations and accountability for perpetrators, especially those in positions of power. Furthermore, there must be a societal shift towards recognizing and confronting caste-based discrimination in all its forms. Only through a united front, combining legal, social and educational reforms, can India hope to dismantle the entrenched caste hierarchies that perpetuate such egregious violations of human rights and ensure that every citizen, regardless of caste, can live with dignity, equality and safety.

Dalit Civil Society organizations demand economic justice for social protection

A public demonstration was organized on 25th September, marking World Inequality Day.

The event was held at the local Maitighar Mandala, demanding the guarantee of universal social protection, freedom from caste-based discrimination, economic equality, social justice, health justice, economic justice and climate justice. It was organized by Asia Dalit Rights Forum and its partner organizations.

Dalit civil society and various organizations have demonstrated placards and banners demanding economic justice for the social security of Dalits. Dalit Civil Society Organizations urged that the state should bring effective policies and plans to make the Dalit community financially strong.

In the demonstration, Bhakta Vishwakarma, Secretary General of Asia Dalit Rights Forum, said, "Social justice is not possible without economic justice" and called for a unified movement for the rights of the Dalit community.

On this occasion, Abhishek Sah from the

Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations, Kamala Bishwakarma; President of Jagran Media Center, Sanju Singh Vishwakarma from Dalit Welfare Organization, Mohan Paswan, President of Rastriya Nepal Dalit Kalyan Sangh; Siraha and Lakshmi Pariyar, President of Dalit Mahila Kendra Nepal also expressed their views focusing on social protection, social health, climate justice and economic justice to Dalits in Nepal.

Representatives from Feminist Dalit Women, Samata Foundation, Rastriya Dalit Network, Dignity Initiative and Advancement of Dalit Women Nepal were present at the protest.

The participants demanded that the State take immediate steps to eliminate social discrimination, food crisis, Debt crisis and environmental problems.

The protesters demanded concrete policies and implementation from the State for the economic upliftment of the Dalit community.(RSS)

Source: Rising Nepal Daily



Ground Report: Burden of wood on Panna's innocence; Tribal children struggling to feed their families!

Ankit Pachauri

In Panna district of Madhya Pradesh, the burden of wood on the heads of tribal children is not only suppressing their innocent childhood, but also their future and constitutional rights. The tribal children here, whose age is only between 8 to 12 years, travel a distance of 5 to 7 kilometers daily to collect wood from the forest and sell it in the city, so that they can fulfill the basic needs of their family. Tribal children, who are at the age of playing and going to school, have a heavy load of wood on their small shoulders. The lines of responsibilities are clearly visible on their innocent faces.

These children walking barefoot on the forest trails, away from education and the joys of childhood, are struggling to satisfy the hunger of their family. Read The Mooknayak's ground report investigating the lives of tribal children of Panna district.

Article 21A of the Constitution of India provides children the right to free and compulsory education from the age of 6 to 14 years. Along with this, under Article 24, children below the age of 14 are prohibited from engaging in dangerous and difficult tasks. But the condition of these tribal children of Panna raises the question whether these constitutional rights are limited to papers only?

In the tribal areas of Panna, small children, who are entitled to get education in school, are forced to carry the load of wood. The daily routine of the tribal children here starts every morning with the sun. Barefoot, without slippers, these children move from their village to the city. A heavy pile of wood is on their heads and a clear reflection of struggle is seen on their faces.

The Mooknayak team met these children. An 8-year-old tribal girl who lives in Majha Laliya village, 7 km



away from Panna, said, “Every second or third day we bring wood from the forest and sell it in the city. My father works as a labourer, but he does not get work every day. We are able to bring ration for the house only by selling wood.”

There was a deep shadow of tiredness and despair in her eyes, which was a testimony to the violation of her rights. The tribal girl told us in the common language of that area, “It's time, give me your life, I have to go home with the goods, how will I make new rotis.”

We talked to another such tribal child. The child's age would be between 10 to 12 years. But his words reflected the words of a young boy. That tribal child told The Mooknayak, the roof of my house has broken due to rain. Rainwater is entering the house. I have to get it repaired. I have to buy new tarpaulin (plastic).

In response to our question, the tribal child told us that he has four siblings. He is the eldest in the family. His father used to work as a stone breaker. Now he comes to Panna to work as a labourer. He does whatever work he gets. He said in Bundelkhandi, “It is better to play in the village, I should sell wood and collect some money.” [It is better to sell wood and collect some money.]

Selling wood is an important means of livelihood for the tribal children living in villages like Khajuri



Kular, Taprian and Janwar located around Panna district. These children collect wood from the nearby forests and come to sell it in the cities. Due to the difficult geographical and social conditions of these villages, there is a lack of education and other basic facilities, due to which the childhood of these children also becomes a struggle. Work like selling wood becomes the only option to fulfill the financial needs of their families. Local resident Sachin Agarwal, who runs a hotel in Panna city, told The Mooknayak, “These children come to the city every day and sell wood. This has been going on for years. Due to unemployment and poverty, these children are forced to do this work to help their families.” It is clear from his statement that the implementation of government schemes and policies is very weak in these areas.

Indifference of the administration!

Schemes like 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' and 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' are being run across the country, but there is no special effect of these on the tribal children of Panna! The names of these children are registered in schools, but studies and education are far from their reach. For poor tribal families, their livelihood is more important than the education of children. Due to this compulsion, these children are forced to face the tough struggle of life in childhood itself. Under Article 46 of the Constitution, the state should take special care of the economic and educational interests of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but the ground reality is far from this.

We spoke to Panna's Women and Child Development Officer Udal Singh in this regard, he said, “We were not aware of this problem. This matter has come to our notice by you, we will take it seriously and will send an investigation team soon.” This situation is

proof of how far the local officials are from constitutional values and responsibilities. They are not aware of the ground reality, which highlights the lack of implementation of constitutional rights in this area and the adverse effect on the lives of tribal children.

Panna's local journalist Ajit Khare said, “The condition of tribal children here is very pathetic. Government schemes are on paper, but their effect is not visible on the ground. These children are deprived of education and their rights are being violated. These children are enrolled in schools, but this is the situation you are seeing.”

Responsibility of government and society

Under Article 14 of the Constitution, everyone has the right to equality, but for these tribal children of Panna, this equality is limited to words only. The government had to work seriously to provide better opportunities for education and life, but the administration's indifference can be clearly seen here.

These tribal children need not only education, but also a safe and respectable life, as every person is given the right to live under Article 21 of our Constitution. They should have pens in their hands instead of wood and smiles on their faces instead of struggle.

The struggle of the tribal children of Panna shows that there is a deep gap between the rights enshrined in the Constitution and reality. Unless the government and society work together to improve the lives of these children, this gap will not be filled.

Source: Justice News

Dalit repression by ethnic groups

Mitra Pariyar



The Gurung villagers, including some women, assaulted a Dalit man and his mother at their home in the Gurkha village of Lwang, Machhapuchhre Rural Municipality, Kaski, on Friday night. They also broke windows and shouted casteist slurs as well as demeaning remarks. The Dalit victims survived the unprovoked attack, but the single mother required treatment in intensive care at a hospital in Pokhara. Someone bravely took a video of the brutality on their mobile and uploaded it to a YouTube channel. That's how the terrible crime came to public notice.

I learnt from both the video reporting and community members that the local police have refused to register the case as an attempted murder motivated by caste hatred. The local authorities have bent on protecting the accused, their caste fellows, from legal action. This case shows how Dalits continue to suffer mental and physical violence at the hands of ethnic or tribal groups as well.

Upper castes are generally blamed for committing crimes against Dalits, but it is not exclusive to them. I suggest that the incident can also be a window into the rather perplexing question of why ethnic groups like the Gurung, Magar, Rai and Limbu continue to segregate and dominate Dalits, even though their movements have vociferously denounced caste hierarchy and distanced themselves from Hindu

customs and cultures for decades.

Criminals of history

In a recent Kathmandu gathering hosted by the newly established “Front for Identity” (opened two months ago under the leadership of Mahendra Lawoti, professor of political science at Western Michigan University, USA), Gopal Kirati, veteran leader of ethnic communities and former minister from the Maoist party, made an interesting self-reflexive remark. He said, “I’m a criminal of history. Growing up, I learnt nothing from this society and culture except how to treat Dalits worse than animals.”

I wish more ethnic leaders and activists came forward like Kirati and acknowledged their and their communities' ill-treatment of those considered lower or less pure than themselves. The fact that they continue to humiliate and attack Dalits even now should deeply concern them. It's also time they realised their grave mistake of excluding Dalits from their movements, which peaked in the late 1990s and included them in their fight against Brahmanism. Dalits themselves recognise many differences between their issues and those of ethnic minorities; however, in reality, there are many overlaps.

For one thing, in the eyes of the so-called high-caste

Hindu, even ethnic minorities are low-caste Shudra; they, too, are denied the sacred thread and treated as untouchable. Upper castes, mainly orthodox Hindus, don't accept rice prepared by members of ethnic communities. High castes wouldn't normally marry ethnic minorities and even if they did, the latter would face certain restrictions, mainly in the religious and spiritual sphere. An ethnic woman married to an upper caste may be barred from worshipping the lineage deities, for example.

Not to mention, thanks to the extensive Hinduisation of ethnic groups over the years, there's a degree of caste hierarchy practised within and amongst those communities as well. The Gurung wouldn't marry a Tamang, for example, as the latter has been placed only slightly above the Dalit on the scale of ritual pollution.

If the ethnic activists had brought Dalits on board—or at least forged a strong alliance with them—their movements would have become larger and stronger. In the meantime, their populace would probably have been educated about the fallacy and inhumanity associated with the Dalit exclusion. Members of ethnic communities would have learnt that the rejection of caste hierarchy also implies the termination of ritual hierarchy altogether. Thus, the behaviour of these ethnic groups towards Dalits would have hopefully changed quite drastically by now.

Ethnic leaders and activists not only excluded Dalits from their movements but also didn't talk about ending untouchability. They were keen on toppling the Bahun hegemony and separating and suppressing the Dalits. This has been a big failure of ethnic and indigenous identity politics so far. Proponents of ethnic identity should now see this drawback, as Gopal Kiranti seems to have done and try to bring Dalits along with them. The Front for Identity, led by Prof Lawoti, appears keen to move in this direction.

Identity: Horizontal versus vertical

In a highly caste-ridden society like ours, the issues of collective identity and individual freedom seem conflicting. Ethnic politics does reify and solidify group boundaries. Ethnic groups are eager to highlight and bolster those inter-group boundaries, whereas Dalits want to dissolve those boundaries

once and for all. How do we conceptually overcome this apparent mismatch?

Notably, ethnic groups are horizontally arranged—long-term Hinduisation and casteification notwithstanding. They are culturally separate but, by and large, equal in status hierarchy. There's much equality in how these groups interact with each other. Ethnic activists are keen to preserve and promote this horizontal separation.

This doesn't necessarily hurt Dalits' quest for equality because they want to dismantle the vertical hierarchy and arrange themselves horizontally. They don't want the statuses to be conceived as big and small, high and low, top and bottom, pure and impure. This explains why many Dalits hate the caste system while loving their caste identities. Dalit caste associations aren't as big and influential as ethnic associations, yet they have been an important part of the Dalit movement for decades.

Once people understand the difference between these two sets of identities arranged horizontally and vertically, the ethnic and Dalit movements can coalesce. This way, ethnic and Dalit campaigners can find common ground and struggle together. This should be the new way forward to accelerate societal change.

The recent case of caste violence sheds light on the fact that caste discrimination is rampant within ethnic minority communities, too. They may resent the Hindu social hierarchy in terms of Bahun supremacy, but they are eager to continue suppressing Dalits. My past research and experience show that ethnic communities have played a big role in dominating Dalits, sometimes worse than upper castes!

Things should change now and activists from the new generation must be the active agents of that important change. If you really want to shake the social structure, don't just fix the ones above you. Consider the plight of those below you. It's basically the same principle and practice. If you want to challenge Brahmanic supremacy, get rid of your own supremacy as well. Charity begins at home and so does change!

Source: Kathmandupost



Sri Lanka's cremation apology fails to enthuse minorities

Christians and Muslims have disapproved of the Sri Lankan government's apology for its controversial cremation policy during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Sri Lankan cabinet has approved the "proposal to apologize to the Muslim community for the coercive policy enforced during the Covid-19 period," said Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakse told parliament on July 23.

Rajapakse pushed for an apology among cabinet members, although the policy was imposed during the previous government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

"Although we were not responsible for the decision of forced cremation policy and did not hold positions in the former government at that time, we express our regret to the Islamic community for what occurred during that period," said Rajapakse.

Under Islamic norms, the greatest honor that can be given to a deceased person's body is to clean it and bury it within 24 hours without alteration, said H.A. Azeez, a Muslim rights activist.

The Rajapaksa government in the Buddhist-majority nation enforced a compulsory cremation policy during the pandemic, arguing that burying or washing the bodies may cause the virus to spread.

The policy "deprived us of our tradition" without justification, Azeez added.

"When we cremated the bodies of our relatives, it felt as though we were being cremated," Azeez told UCA news.

On numerous occasions, governments have exploited the Muslim population "for political

gains" and "to appease the Buddhist community," he said.

There were Christians among those subjected to the compulsory cremation, said a Holy Family nun from the Colombo archdiocese, who sought anonymity.

The government decision was an outrageous and offensive infringement on religious rights and basic human dignity, the nun said.

The compulsory cremation policy had caused uproar among the Muslim community, who make up nearly 10 percent of the country's 22 million population.

The apology was meant for cremating 276 Muslims under the policy.

The corpse should be cremated at a temperature of 800 to 1,200 degrees Celsius for a minimum of 45 minutes, the government said in a notification during the pandemic.

"According to our religion, my father could not receive his final respects," said Mohammad Kiyas from Kochchikade in western Negombo, recalling his 64-year-old father's cremation.

"Now, is there any point in apologizing?" he said.

According to official records, Sri Lanka, with a population of some 22 million, reported 16,897 Covid deaths.

Source: UCA News



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