

Caste Violence  
in  
Contemporary India

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The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of the Hindu faith of this odious and vicious dogma.<sup>1</sup>

### **Intolerance by default**

In India every day two dalits are murdered and three dalit women raped.<sup>2</sup> Yearly, around 27000 crimes against former untouchables are recorded and discrimination against them is still *very much alive*.<sup>3</sup> The news is, in this regard, horrifically repetitive: dalit women assaulted and abused in the broad daylight, dalits beaten up or lynched, shot or mutilated, usually with no consequences for the offenders... You could read of pregnant dalit women that died because of not being able to pay bribes at governmental hospitals, of a boy that had an eye gouged out by the relatives of an upper caste girl he was in love with, of an outcaste boiled to death for having dared to argue with his boss... National, mainstream newspapers like *The Times of India*, *The Hindu* or *The Indian Express*, to cite only a few, report similar stories on a daily basis.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *Dr. Ambedkar and caste*, Harijan, February 11, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> *Crime in India*, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2006. So far the official statistics, but it is reasonable to assume that not reported cases are considerably more.

<sup>3</sup> *Report by Mr. Glélé-Ahanhanzo, special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/26*, United Nations Commission on Human Rights, January 15, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Yet, they fail to give an exhaustive account of the reality: «How often can you find them [newspapers and TV channels] using the word untouchability? The privileged educated elite has a virtual, silent ban on that word. Though it exists everywhere, it is seldom spoken of in those terms. How often do we hear it in public discourse? Its use is in inverse proportion to its spread. The moment we start using that word more often, a lot of things change. We have to start facing its implications. We have to see the kind of society we are. We have to face how many of our

Descent-based intolerance is not the only issue India is confronted with,<sup>5</sup> but by sure is one of the challenges that have to be addressed immediately, as it is preventing 160 millions of human beings, a sixth of the Indian population, from exercising their most obvious and fundamental rights.

Abolished by law, caste hate is far from having been overcome in the real, daily life. To know how resilient and pervading is the caste culture and its related racism, you could just have a look at the advertisements for arranged marriages, specifying not only caste, but even the wished sub caste.<sup>6</sup> In a country where land is the primary asset, dalits are in great majority landless. They still live in separated, usually disadvantaged parts of the villages and even to walk in caste Hindu streets is dangerous for them. Their segregation is reinforced by the lack of electricity, sanitation facilities, and water pumps, present only in the upper caste section. The same applies to medical facilities. Dalits are neither granted access to common wells nor to burial grounds. Dalit schoolchildren usually sit separately, in the back of classrooms. In many villages separate glasses continue to be used for serving dalits in tea stalls, dalits are often banned entry into temples, barbers refuse to cut them the hair. Women, traditionally perceived as bare properties, are often assaulted and sexually abused. Dalit children have to work from a very early age to pay off generation-old debts and the *devadasi* practise, forced prostitution of a girl dedicated to a temple god and eventually auctioned into a brothel, is still common practice, notably in the south.

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privileges rest on someone else's misery». P. Sainath, *Dalits and human rights: the battles ahead*, PUCL Bulletin, People's Union for Civil Liberties, June-August 1999.

<sup>5</sup> «Perpetrators of past human rights violations continued to enjoy impunity. Concerns grew over protection of economic, social and cultural rights of already marginalized communities. Human rights violations were reported in several states where security legislation was used to facilitate arbitrary detention and torture. A new anti-terror law, in place of the repealed Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), was being considered in the aftermath of multiple bombings in Mumbai and elsewhere. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), long criticized for widespread abuses in the north-east, was not repealed. Justice and rehabilitation continued to evade most victims of the 2002 Gujarat communal violence. Human rights legislation was amended undermining the powers of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). New laws to prevent violence against women and guarantee rural employment and right to information had not been fully implemented by the end of the year. Socially and economically marginalized groups such as adivasis, dalits, marginal/landless farmers and the urban poor continued to face systemic discrimination and loss of resource base and livelihood because of development projects», Amnesty International, *Report*, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> By the way, not only among Indians living in India. See for instance Joseph Berger, *Family ties and the entanglements of caste*, The New York Times, October 24, 2004.

Decades after B.R. Ambedkar issued the clarion call for its annihilation, caste continues to dominate the social, cultural, religious and political horizon of India. The sun has set over the great British Empire; but not over the Caste Empire.<sup>7</sup>

Even when it comes to natural calamities, caste (with faith) decides over life or death. In the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake in January 2001, relief measures and criteria were plainly based on caste and religion, dalits and Muslims having been neglected and disadvantaged, as reported by several sources. Similar the scenario after the December 2004 tsunami: «The discrimination was present at all phases of the recovery process, from the denial of rice, the refusal to share emergency shelters, the removal of bodies, and the relief materials provided, through to the compensation and provision of livelihood assistance and housing»:<sup>8</sup>

The discrimination was not planned or organised centrally by the caste fishermen; it merely played out its natural course as a result of thousands of years of an unchallenged caste system. It is the *lack* of planning and organisation to tackle the discrimination that ensured it took place. As is often the case in India, the discrimination was not generally malicious, but stemmed rather from an unwillingness to confront the discrimination and go against the current. In other words, this is 'discrimination by default'.<sup>9</sup>

### **A political question**

Even if, being hereditary and substantially endogamous, castes constitute quite closed entities, they have nothing to do with races. «The Caste system - has written Ambedkar - cannot be said to have grown as a means of preventing the admixture of races or as a means of maintaining purity of blood. As a matter of fact Caste system came into being long after the different races of India had commingled in blood and culture. To hold that distinctions of Castes are really distinctions of race and to treat different Castes as though they were so many different races is a gross perversion of facts».<sup>10</sup>

That said, the claim of the Indian government that, being castes different to races, descent-based discrimination has not to be regarded as a form of racism, and is therefore a purely internal Indian affair, has no consistency. Any collectively practiced and endured deprivation of rights and dignity *is* racism, albeit not in the narrower sense of the word. Not for

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<sup>7</sup> *Discrimination that must be cast away*, The Hindu, June 3, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Gill, *Making things worse. How 'caste blindness' in Indian post-tsunami disaster recovery has exacerbated vulnerability and exclusion*, Dalit Network Netherlands, February 2007.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of caste*, Arnold Publishers, 1990, 5.

nothing this principle has been expressly and repeatedly embraced also by international bodies. In 1996, for instance, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) stated clearly that the term *descent*, mentioned in the *International convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination*, does not refer solely to race, but encompasses also the situation of scheduled castes and tribes. The CERD *General recommendation XXIX* (2002) reaffirmed this position, adding that discrimination based on descent «includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification such as caste and analogous systems of inherited status which nullify or impair their equal enjoyment of human rights».<sup>11</sup>

If you prefer, think of the caste system as a form of racism within the same race, an expression patently self-contradictory, but perfectly highlighting the moral perversion of this state of affairs. However, I would rather describe the matter as it really is: a subtle mechanism of social exploitation. A mechanism whose cultural and pseudo-religious aspects are but derivative products, expressions of hegemonic elites eager to promote a vision of the world favourable to their own interests in terms of social and economic power.

Indeed, wherever human beings are forced into living in less than human conditions, into surviving only thanks to activities that nobody would freely accept, humiliated and handled *de facto* as slaves for the exclusive advantage of a dominating group with no other hope than arbitrary mercy, the right word to be used should be *social oppression* or *tyranny*.

Caste discrimination is a political question.

A political question in its purest form that, concerning personal and social fundamental rights, not to speak of human dignity, pertains to every human being on the earth.

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<sup>11</sup> See *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: India*, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD/C/304/Add.13), September 17, 1996, and *General recommendation XXIX on article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention (Descent)*, CERD, A/57/18 (2002) 111. Episodes of real racism, by the way, can be easily documented. With reference to a recent one, Nirmal Shekar has written that «there is little to be gained in pretending that racism is something that exists in 'other' countries, that India and its great culture have a natural immunity to this virus. This attitude reflects a lack of courage. If you employed the broadest possible definition of racism, then this country perhaps has more racists per square kilometer than most other countries on this planet», *Deal with it now*, The Hindu, October 19, 2007.



## Weakened religion

Dayanand has proved that a correct interpretation of the Rig Veda contradicts any caste system based on birth. Vivekananda has written that the caste system is even contrary to the Vedanta. Gandhi, murdered by the hand of a brahmin, had fought his entire life for the unity of all Indians, no matter which religion they had or which caste they belonged to.

In vain.

Before being *a blot on humanity*, as the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently conceded, untouchability is a blot on India and, specifically, on its leading class and on an abused religion. And it is not just a blot, but a *crime*.

Today more than ever, under the burden of the caste prejudice, Hinduism is in a cultural check. It is a morally weakened religion.

What is called Religion by the Hindus is nothing but a multitude of commands and prohibitions. Religion, in the sense of spiritual principles, truly universal, applicable to all races, to all countries, to all times, is not to be found in them, and if it is, it does not form the governing part of a Hindu's life... I have, therefore, no hesitation in saying that such a religion must be destroyed and I say, there is nothing irreligious in working for the destruction of such a religion. Indeed I hold that it is your bounden duty to tear the mask, to remove the misrepresentation that is caused by misnaming this Law as Religion.<sup>12</sup>

Following Ambedkar's example, mass conversions to Buddhism have been organised in the recent years for dalits who desire to finally get rid of their outcaste background. As a countermeasure to such religious haemorrhage, the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party has tried in Gujarat to put a stop to the conversions by amending an anti-conversion law now classifying Buddhism and Jainism as branches of Hinduism. This highly controversial move has made conversions more difficult while, on the other side, «the loss of constitutional privileges upon conversion (to Christianity and Islam) is a serious impediment to dalits' freedom to choose their religion».<sup>13</sup> And, sadly enough, discriminatory practices have been assimilated also by other faiths in the subcontinent, Christianity included.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Annihilation of caste*, cit., 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Hidden apartheid. Caste discrimination against India's 'untouchables'*, Shadow report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Human Rights Watch – Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, February 2007.

<sup>14</sup> See for a first introduction to this topic the voice *Caste system among Indian Christians* on Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org) or look for *Christian caste* in the online edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (www.britannica.com).

## Caste mafia

The Indian Constitution has formally abolished castes in 1950.

Among other, articles 15, *Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth*, 17, *Abolition of Untouchability*, 29, *Protection of interests of minorities* and 46, *Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections*, clearly ban the discriminatory nature of caste forbidding any discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and provide for proper protection against caste-based discrimination.

Following such constitutional guarantees, the Indian government has successively passed the *Protection of Civil Rights Act* (1955), the *Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act* (1976), the *Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act* (1989) and the *Employment of Manual Scavenging and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act* (1993). Despite these efforts, the effects of these and related laws has been in many cases *painfully slow*,<sup>15</sup> if not negligible. And, by reaction, caste violence is on constant rise since the early 1990s, causing thousands of deaths.

The point is India is not lacking laws, but law enforcement or, in other words, political will, specifically in those rural regions where the main part of the population (and over 80 per cent of the dalits) is living.<sup>16</sup>

A many-sided, ubiquitous caste mafia is daily betraying the Constitution, acting as if the national legislation had no actual implication and enjoying an almost unlimited impunity. Local landlords with their private militias (notorious the *senas* in Bihar) use any possible means to preserve their extra-judiciary power in spite of any other national

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<sup>15</sup> Siddharth Narrain, *Abolition of manual scavenging slow*, The Hindu, February 26, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> «Where policies and laws are in place, enforcement and implementation are often lacking or unsatisfactory. Affirmative action measures have assisted a small number of dalits in obtaining formal jobs, but have failed to lead to more even progress in providing equal opportunities to all. Purely developmental approaches to improving the lot of the dalits are insufficient, if the underlying structural causes and caste barriers are not simultaneously addressed», *Equality at work: Tackling the challenges*, global report under the follow-up to the International Labour Organisation Declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work, International Labour Conference, 96th Session, ILO, 2007. Kunal Ghosh reports that even the army, when it comes to recruiting Hindu priests, flouts the Constitution adding in its advertisements remarks like 'persons belonging to traditional families will be given preference'. «What they implement – he writes – is not preference for one caste, the Brahmins, but exclusion of all other castes», *Amend Bhim smriti to annihilate caste*, Plural India, July 3, 2007.

authority. Intimidation, self-justice and gangster-style executions are the norm.

On the night of December 1, 1997, an upper-caste landlord militia called the Ranvir shot dead sixteen children, twenty-seven women, and eighteen men in the village Laxmanpur-Bathe, Jehanabad district Bihar. Five teenage girls were raped and mutilated before being shot in the chest. The villagers were alleged to have been sympathetic guerrilla group known as Naxalites that had been demanding more equitable land redistribution in the area. When asked why the sena killed children and women, one member told Human Rights Watch, «We kill children because they will grow up to Naxalites. We kill women because they will give birth to Naxalites».<sup>17</sup>

Before, while and after elections are held, dalits are regularly intimidated, beaten up, murdered... A situation complicated by the difficulties the dalits have when seeking for justice. Access to the legal system is for them often unaffordable and, what is even worse, sometimes to be undertaken under the fear of one's own life. Under represented among the advocates and substantially absent among the judges, dalits just can't hope in a fair trial. Witnesses are hard to be found, charges are framed.

According to *Justice denied*, a report on a carnage that took place in Tsundur, Andhra Pradesh, the moral and social drawbacks of such a plainly misapplied justice are devastating:

Regardless of the case being a sensational one awaiting justice for 12 years, the attitude of the State Government and the district civil and police administration is highly reprehensible. We feel that it is an intentional one of helping the culprits. The attitude is an outcome of racist understanding toward the dalits and their cause. It makes dalits lose faith in the administration of justice as they eagerly wait for justice.<sup>18</sup>

Most often victims of violence are advised, even by the police, not to file any complaint to avoid further, dire consequences. Courageous disobedient people can and have often been exemplary *punished*.<sup>19</sup> In other cases the police prevented independent and social organisation from entering the village to ascertain the facts, arbitrarily denying their right to

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<sup>17</sup> *Caste discrimination: a global concern*. A report by Human Rights Watch for the United Nations world conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Durban, South Africa, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> K.G. Kannabiran, J. Moses, *Justice denied*, PUCL, December 2003.

<sup>19</sup> On the other side, «no other groups are so systematically criminalized by the police as dalits and adivasis are. The ruling classes have simply found this the best way of dealing with these sections — to criminalize them. Almost any single action of a dalit or adivasi can lead to their being charged with some crime», *Dalits and human rights*, cit.

information.<sup>20</sup> Also an improper use of emergency laws, granting the armed forces more than controversial powers, is still a common means of intimidation.<sup>21</sup> In a testimony presented to the United States' House of Representatives, Amnesty speaks in this regard of «apparent attempts by the state to limit the work of human rights defenders in internationalizing the issue of discrimination against *dalits*».<sup>22</sup>

In these and several other recorded cases the reaction of the police has been irresponsibly negligent, to say the least. Other times authorities and police officers have demonstratively shown their loyalty to upper caste members, implicitly tolerating, if not actively taking part into, their violence.<sup>23</sup>

In this *culture of violence, silence and impunity*,<sup>24</sup> dalit women are obviously more vulnerable than any other social group. A well documented report on this highly delicate topic underlines that «violence against Dalit women is systematically utilised to deny them opportunities,

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<sup>20</sup> See for instance *Attacks on dalits at Kalappatti*, Tamil Nadu, report of the PUCL fact finding team, People's Union for Civil Liberties, May 2004.

<sup>21</sup> «In at least two states, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh, the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002 (POTA) was widely used against Dalits, who were targeted for their caste status rather than any involvement in criminal or terrorist activity. Dalit activists are also accused of being 'terrorists,' 'threats to national security,' and 'habitual offenders,' and frequently charged under the National Security Act, 1980, the Indian Explosives Act, 1884, and even older counter insurgency laws such the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act 1987 (commonly known as TADA). Dalit activists are often subjected to specious prosecutions, falsified charges, and physical abuse and torture following arrest», *Hidden apartheid*, cit.

<sup>22</sup> T. Kumar, *India's unfinished agenda. Equality and justice for 200 million victims of the caste system*. Before the subcommittee on Africa, human rights and international operations, committee on international relations, United States House of Representatives, Amnesty International U.S.A., October 6, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> «Amnesty International believes that the current policing structure encourages discrimination by allowing police to act at the behest of particular powerful groups rather than to act lawfully in the interests of society as a whole and by encouraging arrest on the basis of suspicion rather than on investigation and evidence. In practice also, the failure to prosecute many unlawful activities of the police and the problems of victims in accessing justice mean that discriminatory practices are perpetuated. The prevalence of political interference in policing by powerful individuals and groups, ensures that the most socially and economically weak members of society are most vulnerable to abuses including torture and ill-treatment by police at the behest of those groups. Victims have nowhere to turn but to the police to enforce laws designed to end discrimination. But the police are not equipped or willing to do so. It is an enduring problem which can no longer be overlooked», *ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> Aloysius Irudayam, Jayshree P. Mangubhai and Joel G. Lee, *Dalit women speak out*, National campaign on dalit human rights, National Federation of Dalit Women, Institute of development education, action and studies, 2006..

choices and freedoms at multiple levels, undermining not only Dalit women's dignity and self-respect, but also their right to development»:<sup>25</sup>

Dalit women endure violence in both the general community and in the family, from state and non-state actors of different genders, castes and socio-economic groupings. An overview of the forms, frequency and locations of violence, perpetrators and causal factors for violence highlights the incongruence between Dalit women's reality and the universal right of women to freedom from any gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm.<sup>26</sup>

### **In the international focus**

Such state of affairs is now luckily shifting into the focus of the international community. In 1997 the United Nations Human Rights Committee noted that members of scheduled castes endured *severe social discrimination* and suffered «disproportionately from many violations of their rights» under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>27</sup>

As a consequence of similar considerations, the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights passed the resolution 2000/4 on *Discrimination based on work and descent*.<sup>28</sup> The resolution, aimed at addressing the caste issue, affirmed once again that discrimination based on work and descent is prohibited under international human rights law.

A turning point in last years' debate on caste has been the *World congress on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*, a conference promoted by the United Nations in Durban, in 2001. India's answer to the request of discussing also the caste system ranged from claiming that the issue was an internal affair, not to be interfered with by the United Nations, to ensuring that, given the legislation in place, caste was no longer a problem that needed to be addressed. In 2002 the CERD, «noting that the existence of such discrimination has become evident... [and] strongly condemning descent-based discrimination, such as discrimination on the basis of caste and analogous systems of inherited status, as a violation of the Convention», recommended measures of general and specific nature to avoid discrimination, segregation, dissemination of hate and to promote the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> *Report by Mr. Glélé-Ahanhanzo*, cit.

<sup>28</sup> *Discrimination based on work and descent*, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Human Rights, resolution 2000/4 (E.CN.4.SUB.2.RES.2000.4), August 11, 2000.

civil, political, economic and social rights of the discriminated communities.

In 2005 a political body of the United Nations referred directly to the caste discrimination for the first time. In virtue of the resolution 2005/109, two special rapporteurs have been appointed by the Commission on Human Rights with the task of preparing a comprehensive study on work and descent-based discrimination.

Moreover, answering to the report submitted by the Indian government, the CERD last year (2007) expressly criticized the lack of «detailed information on measures taken to implement anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation»<sup>29</sup> and its failure to prevent discrimination and abuses. The Committee, concerned among other about the alarming number of acts of violence against dalit women, noted that, despite the constitutional abolition, a dalits segregation still persists, and that arbitrary arrests, torture and extra-judicial killings of dalits by the police have been repeatedly reported.

Given that, there is little doubt the Indian government will have to tackle the caste plight more seriously than ever in the next few years. And not only because India is now exposed to increasing international relations and scrutiny, but even because this shaming and perverse system is already acting as a political destabilizing factor, so that the future of the whole Indian society will strongly depend on the solutions given to this issue. Political pressure and rapid economic transformations are indeed already eroding established social structures and hierarchies. In some cases, brahmins and dalits have recently fought together against enriched and violent middle class castes. In some other, castes have demanded to be downgraded to the status of scheduled caste to enjoy the benefits of proactive, affirmative action policies like reservations.<sup>30</sup> In the past few years the dalits' cause has so enjoyed also in India growing political visibility and, for the first time in December 2006, Manmohan Singh, the current Prime Minister, likened the discrimination against dalits to the South African apartheid.

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<sup>29</sup> *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the convention. Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: India*, CERD (CERD/C/IND/CO/19), May 5, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> See Amelia Gentleman, *Indian shepherds stoop to conquer caste system*, The New York Times, June 3, 2006. Reserved quotas, usually anxiously opposed by upper castes members and private sector's industries as well, both afraid of losing power and competitiveness, have shown some positive effects on the otherwise age-old rigid social ladder, even though they have not found full implementation (see the data issued by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for more details).

The power of a democratic vote has made them [the dalits] a force to be reckoned with. All parties are trying to appeal to them, creating policies aimed at addressing their concerns.<sup>31</sup>

### **All my sisters and bothers**

What makes the fight against caste discrimination so difficult is the fact that any feeling of inter-caste solidarity has been inhibited for ages. Ambedkar has gone so far to state that the Hindu society as such is a *myth*: «Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence. Its survival is the be all and end all of its existence».<sup>32</sup> Under such circumstances,

... this scaling of castes, makes it impossible to organise a common front against the Caste System. If a caste claims the right to inter-dine and inter-marry with another caste placed above it, it is frozen, instantly it is told by mischief-mongers, and there are many Brahmins amongst such mischief-mongers, that it will have to concede inter-dining and inter-marriage with castes below it! All are slaves of the Caste System. But all the slaves are not equal in status... Castes form a graded system of sovereignties, high and low, which are jealous of their status and which know that if a general dissolution came, some of them stand to lose more of their prestige and power than others do. You cannot, therefore, have a general mobilization of the Hindus, to use a military expression, for an attack on the Caste System.<sup>33</sup>

Probably for the very same reason, any claim for equal rights and acknowledgment is still referring to the caste system as if this were the only possible source for self-definition and collective identification. Sadly enough though, without erasing the caste system as such from one's own mindset, there will be no hope to really overcome caste discrimination. In their conceptual component (as epiphany of the political state of affairs) the roots of caste intolerance can in fact be eradicated only re-founding the culture of the next generations destroying any form of *caste-thinking*:

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<sup>31</sup> Krishna Dharma, *Caste out*, The Guardian, October 30, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> *Annihilation of caste*, cit., 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 21. «The caste order, – explains in other words a PUCL report – while maintaining a functional hierarchy, also confers the logic and legitimacy to oppress those below by those above. In this power sharing structure, *Varnashrama Dharma* retained the rigid order without any fracturing all these years. When a challenge to this order is perceived, status quo is sought to be achieved brutally. The prevailing peace is then conducive to the oppressive forces to maintain the oppression», *Attacks on dalits at Kalappatti*, cit.

Caste is a notion, it is a state of the mind. The destruction of Caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a *notional* change.<sup>34</sup>

It is the caste system as a whole that has to be challenged. And it is the notion of caste as such that must be rejected. It's time to forget this name morally and concretely banning its meaning and practices, confining it to history books once for all, as it belongs to any unjustifiable form of tyranny. How?

Solidarity is the answer.

Let new deeds forge the world to come.

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<sup>34</sup> *Annihilation of caste*, cit., 20.



## SELECTED RECENT ARTICLES AND REPORTS

*Attacks on dalits at Kalappatti*, Tamil Nadu, report of the PUCL fact finding team, People's Union for Civil Liberties, May 2004.

*Caste discrimination: a global concern*. A report by Human Rights Watch for the United Nations world conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Durban, South Africa, 2001.

*Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: India*, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD/C/304/Add.13), September 17, 1996.

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*Crime in India*, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2006 ([www.ncrb.nic.in](http://www.ncrb.nic.in)).

*Dalits break through UN wall of silence on caste*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, April 19, 2005.

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*Discrimination based on work and descent*, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Human Rights, resolution 2000/4 (E.CN.4.SUB.2.RES.2000.4), August 11, 2000.

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*Discrimination that must be cast away*, The Hindu, June 3, 2001.

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*Equality at work: Tackling the challenges*. Global report under the follow-up to the International Labour Organisation Declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work, International Labour Conference, 96th Session, ILO, 2007.

*Final declaration of the global dalits conference against racism and caste-based discrimination: occupation and descent-based discrimination against dalits*, World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, March 2001.

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Dalit Network Netherlands, c/o India Committee of the Netherlands, Mariaplaats 4e, 3511 LH Utrecht, The Netherlands ([www.dalits.nl](http://www.dalits.nl)).

Human Rights Watch, 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th floor, New York, NY 10118-3299, U.S.A. ([www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)).

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Institute of Development Education, Action and Studies, 26A Valaithoppu, Chinthamani Road, Madurai, 625001 - India.

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