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## No Swachh Bharat Without Caste Annihilation

by Dr Anand Teltumbde



Narendra Modi's theatrics seem unstoppable. Within the last six months that he has been prime minister, he has engaged in too many of them but achieved very little of the *acchhe din* he promised the people. On Teachers' Day, he cancelled the customary holiday for schoolkids and

made them come to school to listen to him on television. On Gandhi Jayanti he again cancelled the commemorative national holiday and made people wield *jhadoos* to launch the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*.

While most of his theatrics evoked mild controversies,

this one, potentially the most controversial and problem-ridden, seems to have gone well with most people – probably because Modi was doing a Gandhi here; because he anticipated some of the skepticism and quashed it; because the issue was too important for the image of India as a “great nation” to create controversies.

But beyond all this, the main reason for the silence was the collective ignorance of the causality of unclean India being rooted in the caste culture and, more so, the need for its eradication through the annihilation of caste.

There is little doubt that India stands out in the world as a uniquely unclean country. There is no official index of uncleanliness to compare countries but few

may dispute that the ubiquity of filth is almost unique to India. Uncleanliness is uncritically attributed to poverty.

Whether it is at the individual level or at the level of the country, poverty results in the lack of basic sanitation infrastructure and operating wherewithal to maintain cleanliness. Since India has widespread poverty, its filth is also tacitly linked with it.

But this association does not hold. There are poorer countries than India but, in terms of cleanliness, they still look better than her. It is commonplace in India to observe people defecating all around public toilets wherever they exist. Cleanliness is more of a cultural matter than poverty.

*continued on pg 4***Savarna**

**Dalit:** “Sir, that lady, the savarna one, she is getting more salary than me but I got more education than her. I got more experience. Sir this is casteism”

**Savarna:** But she published one paper more than you.

**Increase in Relief for Dalits**

The Centre's move to increase monetary compensation to the family of murdered Dalits up to Rs.7.50 lakh would greatly help in rehabilitation, said A. Kadir, Executive Director, Evidence, a non-governmental organisation.

He said the government should implement amendments to the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, without further delay. The amended Act would not only prevent atrocities against Dalits but also discourage law offenders as loose-ends in the law would be tightened, he said.

Mr. Kadir said the Union Ministry of Social Justice and

Empowerment had made many changes in relief disbursal. The relief for sexual assault on a Dalit woman would be Rs.1.80 lakh against Rs.90,000 given earlier. Fifty per cent of it would be paid after the medical examination of the victim and the rest after the conclusion of trial.

For denial of customary right of passage, the victim shall get a compensation of up to Rs.3.75 lakh or full cost of restoration of right of passage and compensation for the loss suffered. Upon filing of charge sheet, 50 per cent of compensation would be released and the balance given on conviction in a lower court.

## Dalit Votes Decisive in Delhi Elections

With an estimated 22 lakh scheduled caste population in Delhi, their votes will play a decisive role in the assembly elections. In 2013, the community had helped the Aam Aadmi Party increase its vote share, giving it nine out of 12 reserved seats. This election, BJP has set its focus on this crucial vote share and has drawn up an elaborate plan to break away one of AAP's core support base.

Over the years, the vote share has shifted from Congress to BSP to AAP. BJP has so far failed to capture the mindspace of this community. After missing the opportunity to form the government in Delhi by a whisker, BJP is carefully planning its strategy for the upcoming polls. This time the BJP is going all out to woo SC votes. From organizing special meetings in areas with high percentage of SC voters to including Dr B R Ambedkar's

photograph in its posters, the party is trying to make a dent in AAP's vote-bank.

North West Delhi MP Udit Raj, who had joined the BJP just before Lok Sabha elections, organized a Maha rally of SC community on December 8. Raj, the party's SC face in the city, says the rally will be attended by senior



BJP leaders where members of the community will discuss a wide range of issues, including demand for reservation in

government jobs. “This is a longstanding demand of the community and it must be addressed immediately. With BJP government at the Centre, the community is confident that things will move in the right direction,” said Raj.

AAP sources say that to wean away the SC support from it, BJP needs to have some credible functionaries. Udit Raj is the party's only Dalit face except that he is a Jatav who is a practising Buddhist.

“As per the latest census, there are about 11.5 lakh Jatavs in Delhi but very few of them are Buddhists. Out of the 12 SC seats in Delhi, AAP won nine in the last election while BJP won two. Of these, the Gokulpuri seat is contentious since the BJP candidate has been accused of contesting from the reserved seat with a fake caste certificate. Even here BJP goofed up,” said a senior AAP member.

**Courtesy:** Economic Times

## UN Agencies Working Together for Dalit, Adivasi Issues

Convened by the United Nations Development Programme, six UN agencies including IFAD, ILO, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women are working together to help accelerate inclusion of Dalit and Adivasi issues and access to rights in national and state policy and planning processes.

The team has been formed in recognition of the key role fighting exclusion and marginalisation of Dalits and Adivasi plays in reaching development goals and access to key rights for a large proportion of the population in India.

They write on the www.in.one.un.org website, “Targeting interventions to the most disadvantaged improves lives and addresses multi-dimensional poverty,” and

“The United Nations in India is committed to support the Government of India's efforts towards greater inclusion of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the development process.”

Among other initiatives, the team has launched a campaign to end manual scavenging including the production of a briefing leaflet on manual scavenging entitled *Breaking Free: Rehabilitating Manual Scavengers* and photo essays and videos to create awareness and engagement.

The many UN agencies present voiced a strong commitment to working jointly and with civil society, Government and the corporate sector to ensure proper rehabilitation of manual scavengers.

## India Criticized for Blocking Dalit Solidarity Network

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association Mr. Maina Kiai noted that reprisals are an area of the gravest concern and that states repeatedly target organisations, thus obstructing legitimate civil society participation. He highlighted the example of the politicized NGO Committee, which recommends UN consultative status to NGOs, deliberately and arbitrarily deferring the application of International Dalit Solidarity Network (ISDN).

“Since 2008, this NGO that focuses on caste-based discrimination has received 64 written questions from the Committee, all raised by India. It is now the longest pending application before the NGO Committee,” Maina Kiai said.

Many States speaking at the UN General Assembly noted concern that the NGO committee, meant to ensure inclusion of civil society at the UN, is acting in a manner contrary to its purpose and the ECOSOC resolution.

Norway specifically highlighted in its statement, “The continued deferral for seven years of the International Dalit Solidarity Network's application for accreditation as an NGO with the UN ... is in our view unacceptable and the situation should be rectified.”

Maina Kiai suggested a reform of the NGO Committee to ensure that unjustified blocks of legitimate human rights organisations such as ISDN do not occur.

The United States representative stated that the US, “Strongly support the

Special Rapporteurs call for reform of the Committee on NGOs to prevent Member States from blocking accreditation applications by posing perpetual questions and blocking consensus.”

Meanwhile Russia, China and Bahrain were critical in their response and Russia asked that the issues be resolved through “constructive cooperation with governments” as some NGOs have a “negative impact”.

Other areas of grave concern noted by Maina Kai included reprisals against human rights defenders participating in UN events and processes, the lack of adequate funding for the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the increasingly shrinking space for civil society nationally and internationally.



## Muslim-Dalit Social Coalition on the Cards

In an attempt to forge a Muslim and Dalit social coalition in the Maharashtra, where the communities together account for over 24% of the population, the All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) has taken up the cause of the recent Dalit killings at Javkheda Khalsa. AIMIM chief and Lok Sabha MP from Hyderabad, Asaduddin Owaisi, recently visited the village in Ahmednagar.

Alleging that the police had failed to track down the killers, the party demanded transfer of the case to the CBI and fast-tracking of the trial. In October, Sanjay Jadhav, wife Jayashree and son Sunil were murdered and their body parts were recovered from a well.

Indicating a massive anger against "secular" parties like the Congress, two AIMIM nominees were elected to the Maharashtra assembly from Muslim-dominated seats. However, out of its 24 candidates, some were Dalits, and the party supported former minister Gangadhar Gade from Aurangabad West. Gade is a product of the 'Namantar' movement, which had called for the Marathwada university to be named after Dalit icon Dr Ambedkar.

"It is sad that even three weeks later (the police) do not

have anything on hand," said AIMIM legislator from Aurangabad Central Imtiaz Jaleel. "The (culprits) are not organised criminals. This was a small village where the murders took place and the bodies were cut into pieces," he said.

Stressing the need for a CBI probe, Jaleel lamented that the special task force (STF) announced by the Governor was yet to be formed.

"The Ambedkarite movement is almost rudderless. There is a lack of unity... leaders have failed to rise to the occasion," said Gade, who was part of the Dalit Panthers, adding that in contrast, the AIMIM was a strong organisation with resources. "Dalits feel close to him (Owaisi) and think that he has a broad line beyond caste and religion."

This is not the first time that a Dalit-Muslim coalition has been attempted. In the 1980s, Dalits and Muslims formed the Dalit Muslim Suraksha Mahasangh. Recently, the Bahujan Mukti Party supported by Waman Meshram's All India Backward (SC, ST, OBC) and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) faction, had tried to field German Bakery blasts accused Mirza Himayat Beg from Aurangabad in the Lok Sabha polls. **Courtesy: DNA**

## Dalits Poorer Than Muslims

DNAIndia reports that, "Over 44.8% of ST and 33.8% of SC populations in rural India were below poverty line in 2011-12 as against 30.8% of Muslims. In urban areas, 27.3% of ST and 21.8% of SC were poor, whereas economically backward Muslims stood at 26.5%. Even decline in poverty among rural ST population was the slowest."

The DNA report is based on the findings of the Prof Amitabh Kundu report which was submitted to the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs in October. Dalits comprise 24.4 percent (16.6% SC, 8.6% ST) of India's population, while Muslims constitute 14%, as per the 2011 census.

The difference in monthly average per capita expenditure (MPCE at the constant price), another indicator of social well-being, also shows that STs are no better than the Muslims.

"The ST Hindus are at the bottom of the ladder in rural areas, followed by SC and then by the Muslims, unchanged over the past two decades. In urban areas, Muslims figure in the bottom and then comes the SC/ST population", the paper said quoting the Kundu report.

Quoting PL Punia, an ex-IAS and former MP and chairman of National Commission of Schedule Caste and Tribes, the paper also said "Dalit scholars blame the situation on flawed policies, reservation, and

failed Dalit leadership. The poor Dalits have no other option but to study in government schools which doesn't take them anywhere. The government must scale up its efforts to improve education."

According to Prof PG Jogdand, social scientist and dean faculty of arts, Mumbai University, it's the creamy layer that has been enjoying all the benefits of reservation since generations. "Hence, despite significant improvements in the past few decades, the disparity in the community is rising, which is alarming."

He also underlined the need of more income-generating efforts, especially in rural areas. "Government must start awarding projects in the rural areas to only those who have never got the benefit of reservation," says Prof Jogdand who backs a revision in reservation policy that sieves out people on the basis of number of family members already availed the benefits.

While Ambedkarites like Dr Tushar Jagtap and Jogdand feel that the so-called Dalits leaders in India don't actually represent the community and they hardly did anything for their people, Dalit leaders deny the charge.

Punia claims, "Dalit leaders are doing their best. But definitely, best is not enough," says the newspaper report.

## Spurt in Violence against Dalits in Bihar

According to a report in the *Indian Express*, there has been a remarkable spurt in violent crimes against Dalit communities in Bihar this year.

"Fingers are being pointed at state Chief Minister Jeetan Ram Manjhi, himself a Mahadalit, for lack of a proper response but observers see reasons beyond inept running of the police machinery."

"A state with a dark history of oppression of its lowest-caste poor may be seeing a fragmentation of the "social coalition" of Dalits and upper castes after the split in the governing NDA in June 2013", the paper said.



According to the publication, the rising crime numbers since January last year have been brought in sharp focus by three big anti-Dalit incidents.

These incidents include the rape of six Dalit women and minors in Bhojpur earlier this month; over 150

in Gaya being forced to leave their village after clashes with dominant upper castes in September-end; and Manjhi's highly publicised accusation that a Madhubani temple was cleansed after his visit, the paper said.

Bihar Human Right Commission member and former state police chief Neelmani is quoted as saying: "Police responses have been prompt but issues of social disharmony need to be addressed."

"That a Mahadalit is CM is a great sign of empowerment but social disharmony is continuous work."

## Orissa Dalits Denied Justice

Poor implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 deprived a majority of atrocity victims of free and fair trial in the State, according to Dalit Adhikar Sangathan (DAS), an Odisha-based organisation.

An analysis by DAS, on the basis of information compiled through the exercise of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, says that although charge-sheets were filed in more than 100 cases in four districts of Puri, Jagatsinghpur, Keonjhar and Ganjam, not a single ended in conviction between 2010 and 2013.

"In a three year period between 2010 and 2013, 44 people in Puri district were acquitted while there was no conviction under Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

It shows poor implementation of the Act," charged Jugal Kishore Ranjit, State coordinator of DAS.

Similarly, not a single person was charge-sheeted within 30 days in six districts such as Puri, Balasore, Gajapati, Nabarangpur, Keonjhar and Ganjam between 2010 and 2013.

Also 684 cases were pending for investigation by the state police.

None of the district collectors had sent any proposals for the rehabilitation of the families of death victims and therefore none of the next of kin of the deceased in Odisha were rehabilitated, the DAS coordinator said.

The Dalit Adhikar Sangathan (DAS) demanded the appointment of a high level committee to review the implementation of the Act in the state.

It also demanded that the government of Odisha assess the realisation of the Acts objectives and take appropriate action for effective implementation of the Act.

## HRLN Welcomes Supreme Court Decision

The Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) has welcomed the Supreme Court Decision to grant bail to Soni Sori, an adivasi teacher and to Linga Kododopi.

The Supreme Court granted them permanent bail, saying she could visit her hometown Dantewada. Sori was arrested in October 2011 on charges of helping the Maoists get 'protection money' from steel giant Essar.

"Giving electric shocks, stripping me naked, shoving stones inside me - is this going to solve the Naxal problem," she

had once asked in a letter to the Supreme Court. Human rights activists insisted that Sori was jailed for questioning violations of law by the police and security forces in the state.

"Chhattisgarh has an unwritten set of rules about how an adivasi should behave. You don't organise, you don't agitate, you don't protest against human rights violations, you don't protest against the state, and you certainly don't protest against industrial houses that are in Bastar to usher in the industrial revolution," says, Himanshu Kumar, a social activist

## Dalits 'Created' by Invaders Says RSS

In its renewed impetus to woo Dalits, various other castes and sub-castes, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has embarked on an ambitious exercise to re-write history.

Emboldened by the BJP's success in the Lok Sabha elections, the RSS has intensified its efforts to find and validate a common Hindu thread to unify all groups under one Hindu identity.

Three top RSS leaders have sought to attribute the genesis of Dalits, tribals and many other groups to "Muslim invasion" in medieval times.

They articulated these views in their forewords to three books, authored by BJP spokesman Vijay Sonkar Shastri and released by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat recently — "Hindu Charmakar Jati", "Hindu Khatik Jati" and "Hindu Valmiki Jati". The Sangh leaders claimed that these castes had come into existence due to atrocities by foreign invaders and did not exist in Hindu religion earlier.

According to Bhaiyyaji Joshi, No.2 in RSS hierarchy, 'shudras' were never untouchables in Hindu scriptures. 'Islamic atrocities' during the medieval age resulted in the emergence of untouchables, Dalits and Indian Muslims.

Joshi further elaborated, "To violate Hindu swabhiman

(dignity) of Chanwarvanshiya Kshatriyas, foreign invaders from Arab, Muslim rulers and beef-eaters, forced them to do abominable works like killing cows, skinning them and throwing their carcasses in deserted places."

"Foreign invaders thus created a caste of charmakarma (dealing with skin) by giving such works as punishment to proud Hindu prisoners."

Another RSS functionary, Suresh Soni, echoed the same: "Dalits had their genesis during Turks, Muslims and Mughal eras. Today's castes like Valmiki, Sudarshan, Majhabi Sikhs and their 624 sub-castes came into being as a result of atrocities against Brahmins and Kshatriyas during Medieval or Islamic age," he wrote.

It was a vocation adopted by Hindus to defend their religion."

An overarching Hindu identity beyond any castes or sub-castes is an objective that the RSS has been striving for decades, despite being projected as an upper caste outfit.

The BJP itself, under the stewardship of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, has been actively reaching out to Dalits and OBCs.

The Sangh's latest move looks set to re-ignite a debate on history and historians.-

**Source: Hindustan Times**



## Half of Prisoners in India are Dalits, Muslims and Tribals

The latest data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) on Prison Statistics India for the year 2013 has thrown up a shocking statistic, reflective of how casteism and bias are still an integral part of the Indian psyche.

They show that the percentage of inmates from three minority communities in India -- Dalits, Muslims and the adivasis -- is disproportionately higher than their total population and make up more than half the prison population in the country.

According to the 2013 Census, there were 4.2 lakh people in Indian prisons. Almost 20 percent of them were Muslims although according to the Census 2001 percentage

share of Muslims in India's population was merely 13 percent. And it is just not for the Muslims.

According to the Census of 2011, Dalits constitute 22 percent of all prisoners although they make up around 17 percent of India's total population. The Times of India report added.

That's not it. A New Indian Express report said Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) make up an approximate of 25.2 percent of the Indian population according to the Census of 2011 but their share in India prisons stands at 33.3 percent.

Times of India quoted experts as saying the situation was brought about by exploitation and police apathy towards the

minority community. Usually reeling under social and economic problems, people from these communities hardly have much to back themselves up with, experts said and added that sometimes they are "unable to fight costly cases or often even pay for their bail."

The NCRB data also showed that Rajasthan prisons had the most number of dalit inmates which was followed by Gujarat. According to a report in India Today, a majority of prisoners in Gujarat jails are Dalits.

Of all convicts, 32.9 percent are Dalits, a community which the article notes forms 6.7 percent of Gujarat's entire population. Which if translated in simpler terms means that the proportion of Dalit prisoners in the state is 4.9 times than their share in the state's population. The skewed ratio is a disturbing trend, and has been the case for almost 15 years. **Courtesy: FirstPost.com**

## CM's School has Dalit Cook, Vokkaligas keep Kids away



Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah did his early schooling here. But it mattered little to the little girl at the Higher Primary School in Kupegala village, 35 km from Mysuru, who refused to eat while other children had their mid-day meal as her best friend had not come to school that day. The girl was a Scheduled Caste and her friend, a Vokkaliga.

For nearly two months now the Vokkaligas from the village have not been sending their children to school because one of the three cooks making the mid-day meal is a Dalit woman.

What is worse, the School Development Management Committee (SDMC)

chairman, Puttaswamy Gowda, himself stopped sending his son to the school and only relented after being pulled up by higher officials.

Just because a Dalit woman was appointed a cook here, Vokkaliga children are not coming to school anymore," said a Dalit member of the SDMC, Manjunath.

He also added, "This is not the only discrimination we face."

"Dalits are not allowed to enter village temples and after we entered one in September with the help of the police and officials, it was abandoned by the upper castes. We are not served food in hotels, or allowed to use the community hall either."

### Latest Dalit News

Read the latest Dalit News, Articles, Special Reports and more at our website: [www.dalitcry.org](http://www.dalitcry.org)

### How safe are Dalit families in Ahmednagar?

The recent murder of a dalit family in Ahmednagar district has once again thrown a spotlight on the increasing violence against the community in Maharashtra.

In a gruesome incident similar to the Khairlanji killings, three members of a family were killed, one of them decapitated, before being thrown into a dry well in the Jawakhede Khalsa village of Ahmednagar district on October 21.

Growing atrocities against dalits is not something new in the district. Just four months ago, in July, a 17-year-old dalit boy Nitin R. Aage was killed in Kharda village of Jamkhed tehsil for allegedly having a love affair with an upper-caste girl. Also, a year-and-a-half ago, three dalit youth from Sonai village of Nevasa town of Ahmednagar were murdered.

Sixty-eight years after Independence, atrocities in the name of caste, still continue to take place in the country.

Talking about the increasing atrocities against dalits in Ahmednagar, senior journalist Sudhir Lanke says, "Incidents of dalit murders have mostly taken place in south Ahmednagar, which is adjacent to the (upper caste) Marathwada region. Casteism is a challenge in south Ahmednagar which is still sensitive and not so developed in terms of education." While Buddhist and neo-Buddhists are more aware of their rights, this is not the case with other dalit communities, Lanke added.

In the early 1950s, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar initiated his politics through the Repub-

lican Party of India. But today, with the division of RPI into various groups led by personal ambitions and egos of leaders like Joginder Kawade, R S Gavai, Ramdas Athavale and Ambedkar's grandson Prakash Ambedkar, the dalit communities have no force and leader backing them.

Kunal Shirsathe, a member of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS) said, "Around 69 cases of atrocities have been registered so far in this year. The upper caste communities are not ready to accept the changing socio-economic situation, while no efforts are being made to deliver justice to dalits immediately. After the Sonai dalit murders, former Home Minister RR Patil had assured that the case would be taken up in a Mumbai court and justice would be delivered within one year. But it has been two years since the incident, and the case is still underway in a Srirampur court."

On October 26, Maharashtra Governor Vidyasagar Rao asked the State DGP, Sanjeev Dayal to appoint a Special Task Force (STF) to probe the brutal killings in Jawakhede Khalsa village. Maharashtra Congress Pradesh President Manikrao Thakre visited Jawakhede Khalsa village in Pathardi Taluka. Republican Party of India (A) president and Rajya Sabha MP Ramdas Athavale had visited the village after the incident. His visit was followed by the visit of the director of National Commission for Scheduled Castes.

However, it has been more than a week, with the culprits still at large and no answers on the motive behind the murder.

### Smell Of Untouchability



by Basudev Sunani

*It is just as well that I got to know your blindness from the very start.*

*Simply because my feet touched the ground you are seeking to purify it, sprinkling holy cowdung water.*

*Had I requested your house on rent you would have been enraged and driven me out like a pariah dog.*

*Perhaps you do not know that the land your house stands on is surrounded by air suffused with my dirty breath.*

*The bricks of your house have been made from clay from the river bed where my humble hut stands, moulded by the supple hands of men whom you have discarded, calling them untouchable.*

*Now you have moved into your beautiful house you preach that untouchables are not human beings, that they are worse than animals, to be despised.*

*Dear sir, if you have the moral courage, strip open the walls and look at the rubble and see, how each atom of brick and sand bears the sweet smell of untouchability.*

### Dalit Poet Browbeaten at Sahitya Akademi Event



On 16 November 2014, during the National Book Week, as part of the Sahitya Akademi's Book Exhibition in Nagercoil, where I live, I was invited to speak on the topic, "My Poetry and I". As I have great respect for the Sahitya Akademi, I accepted the invitation and attended the event. During the introductory speech, the respectable Isaac Samuel Nayagam, who teaches at the Department of Tamil, Scott Christian College, Nagercoil, introduced me thus: "In the tradition of Kannadasan, Mu. Mehta, Vairamuthu, and others, the magical poet N.D. Rajkumar would now speak before you." He then took his seat.

I began by saying: "The respected Isaac Samuel Nayagam introduced me as being of the same tradition as Kannadasan, Mu. Mehta and Vairamuthu [all respected Tamil poets, past and present]. I would like to humbly suggest that I do not place myself in the same literary tradition. I function in a radically different literary field. I have no opinion on their literary work. Fine. Let me now begin to speak on my topic."

Immediately, five members from the audience stood up and shouted deeply hurtful imprecations at me, humiliating and silencing me. One of the five, the advocate Radhakrishnan, president of a

charitable organization named after the late chief minister Kamarajar, as well as an outfit called Sivaji Charitable Organization, stood up and made a fist at me. Pointing his finger at me in a threatening fashion, he asked whether I would be able to leave the hall safely after having 'insulted' Kannadasan. The others with Radhakrishnan also stood up and shouted threats, not allowing me to continue with my speech.

I did not criticize Kannadasan or even speak about him. I merely pointed out that I did not belong to his tradition. I requested in a calm, soft voice that I be allowed to speak on the topic given to me. Yet, they kept shouting threats at me, creating such a racket that I could not speak. I turned to the organizers and asked them to provide me with the appropriate environment so I could speak. But they, ignoring the rioters, came up on the stage, grabbed me and forced me to sit down.

It was shocking how the Sahitya Akademi acted: they not only refused to grant me the respect they would give a fan club president (like Radhakrishnan), they were also out to humiliate me. While all this nuisance was going on, the two writers on the stage, Lakshmi Manivannan and Nada. Sivakumar, expressed no concern on my behalf.

- N.D. Rajkumar



## Dalit Bahujan Assertion On Red Soil

When the results of 2014 Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) election were announced, the election of candidates fielded by the All India Students' Association (AISA) to all the four central panel posts made the headlines but what the national media didn't say was that all four were Dalitbahujans and minority students.

It was not only the winners but also the runners-up and a large number of other contenders, who came from the lowest rungs of society. Are the results of 2014 JNUSU election a Dalitbahujan assertion on "red soil"? After looking at the recent trend of JNUSU politics, one is persuaded to call it just that.

Established in 1969, JNU, despite its claim to be based on the idea of social justice, remained for a long period an institution dominated by upper castes and classes. It was only after years of sustained struggle that JNU provided reservations to Dalitbahujan students and faculty. Since the first JNUSU election in November 1971, most of the elected JNUSU presidents have been from the upper strata of society.

This Dalitbahujan assertion may be traced back to the implementation of Mandal reservation in the early 1990s.

by Abhay Kumar

But the major change in the social composition of JNUSU leadership was witnessed post-Mandal II. With the implementation of 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in this premier institution, the social demography began to shift in favour of Dalitbahujans. Today, around 50% of JNU's



students are from the non-upper castes. If the other deprived social groups, minorities and women are included, the upper castes and classes will become a minuscule minority. This change in social demography is seen as a major factor influencing the results of last three JNUSU elections (from 2012-14), in which all presidents were from marginalized communities.

Yet another proof of this assertion is the growth of a number of student organisations founded on the ideology of Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar in post-Mandal II phase. Moreover, JNU has been undergoing Dalitisation

of public culture. Over the years, the traditionally strong left student organisations of JNU, which, until recently, ignored Dalitbahujan icons, have now no hesitation in wearing Ambedkar, Periyar, Birsa Munda and Phule on their sleeve. The images, symbols and icons of the subaltern are all over the place on the JNU campus. Unlike the past, recent wall posters, pamphlets and badges carrying the slogans and images of Dalitbahujan heroes seem to have outshone those of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao.

Another manifestation of this assertion is the inclusion of subaltern agendas. The upper-caste Marxists had contended for a long time that any talk of caste and reservation would fracture the working-class solidarity, but now the ideologues of left parties have no hesitation in having their script and speech emblazoned with terms such as "social justice", "inclusion", representation", "reservation", "dignity" and "annihilation of caste".

"We have to see how far the elected leaders are able to raise the issues of deprived sections" said Chandrasen, a PhD student and 2013 presidential candidate for JNUSU. While this concern is one that Dalitbahujan leaders must heed, this should not stop us from welcoming the newfound dynamism on the campus.

## Dalits Succeed Despite Barriers

by Greg Johnson

In his new book, "Defying The Odds: The Rise of Dalit Entrepreneurs," Devesh Kapur, director of the Center for the Advanced Study of India in Penn's School of Arts & Sciences, tells the stories of 21 members of the Dalit community who have overcome societal and economic barriers to become successful, self-made businessmen.

Grit, says Kapur, is a common trait among the businessmen, in company with drive, hustle, ambition—and some luck.

Many had parents who worked backbreaking hours in order to provide their children with education, and siblings who took less to give one child more access to opportunities and "pull up" the entire family.

Kapur says the single biggest social hurdle in the Dalit community, which numbers around 200 million, is access to education.

Other obstacles include class barriers that emanate from living in an impoverished area, such as lack of access to credit.

Several of the entrepreneurs began their path to social mobility by moving from rural India to metropolitan areas with better opportunities for business.

All but one of the entrepreneurs featured in the book are men. Kapur says Dalit women face the dual impediments of caste and gender discrimination.



Women do, however, play an important role in supporting the men: Wives sell their jewelry and mothers relinquish their savings in order to provide start-up capital.

He says that capitalism, while not altogether good or evil, is "a wrenching force" that has disrupted the caste system.

"[Capitalism] is not a pleasant force," he says. "It's very disruptive. But when you have an entrenched social system, only a disruptive force will change that system."

Kapur argues that although the socioeconomic advantages of birth continue to play a large role in Indian life, market forces have further weakened caste by making the marker for status money and not birth.

"For Dalits," they write, "the odds have shifted from the impossible to the improbable."

The authors concede there is no guarantee the entrepreneurs will become business tycoons.

"Nonetheless," they write, "they are a microcosm of large historical changes that are underfoot in India where a dehumanizing social system is slowly but surely giving way."

Source: Penn Current

continued from pg 1

The poor have to labour in conditions of filth. As landless labourers they work in muddy fields, as non-farm workers working in construction or in extraction industries, they labour in a still more mucky and dusty environment. But still they maintain a functional cleanliness. The poor obviously cannot have cleanliness identified with riches but they innately know the importance of functional hygiene and cleanliness. One can easily see this in the homesteads of the poorest of the poor in villages and tribal hamlets. Even in urban slums, this is largely true; despite many odds, the poor maintain a functional cleanliness within their hutments. The filth gets basically produced in the civic realm and it is disproportionately contributed by the rich.

## No Swachh Bharat Without Caste Annihilation

What then explains the uncleanliness of India? The answer lies in Indian culture which is nothing but caste culture. This culture externalises the responsibility of maintaining cleanliness to a particular caste. It stigmatises work as unclean and workers as untouchables. Although the crude form of untouchability may not be pervasively practised today, it does exist to a significant extent as shown by an Action Aid Survey of 50 villages conducted in 2000, and the survey in 2009 by the Ahmedabad-based Navsarjan Trust and the Robert F Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, which covered Modi's Gujarat.

More than untouchability, a caste ethos is pervasively reflected in the behaviour of Indians. This ethos, which effectively "casteises" and

genders various tasks, persists despite the spread of education, globalisation and urbanisation. While the world over people have imbibed a "civic sense" and primarily bear the responsibility to maintain cleanliness, only secondarily relying upon sanitary workers, in India, people derive a sense of (upper-caste) superiority in littering the place, expecting it to be cleaned by the lower-caste scavenger. If a small community of these scavengers, treated worse than shit and exploited to the hilt, is vested with the responsibility of clearing the filth generated by 1,250 million people with impunity, the country is destined to remain unclean.

It follows that unless this caste culture is eradicated and people themselves internalise the responsibility towards cleanliness, no amount of

campaigns is going to succeed. Surprisingly, there is no mention of the c word in Modi's mission, which smacks of the usual denial mode of the elite that castes no longer exist – they are a non-issue. It will never occur to Modi that his act of beginning the cleanliness drive from the Valmiki Colony actually reinforced the association between Valmikis and scavenging. Gandhi had also paternalistically done the same; without speaking against castes, he just displayed his *mahatmahood* by living among the Bhangis of Delhi.

The main motivation behind this swachh Bharat campaign is basically the supremacist obsession of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which had misled it in the past to declare that India was shining in 2004 when 60% of its

population was defecating in the open. It is to Modi's credit that he has foregrounded this standing shame and decided to construct 12 crore toilets. But even here he had a sleight of hand, relying majorly upon neo-liberal philanthropy, i.e. corporate social responsibility. As he skilfully sidetracked government responsibility in creating sanitation infrastructure, he has evaded it even in creating operational jobs by invoking Gandhian spirituality to ask people to put in voluntary labour of a minimum two hours a week. As proposed, it is going to be one more mega opportunity for corporate investment.

The biggest flaw of Modi's mission is that he has totally missed the point if he really meant business. He must understand that India cannot be swachh without the caste ethos being completely eradicated.



## Opposition Takes on Govt on 'Move' to Bring Changes in MNREGA Scheme



### MNREGA Scheme

Opposition in Rajya Sabha has said that the government seems to be trying to wind up the ambitious rural job guarantee scheme launched by the UPA.

Moving a Calling Attention Motion, D Raja (CPI) said, "MNREGA enacted by UPA government was part of the common minimum programme, which was supported by Left parties. Now, what the BJP-led government is doing is that they are weakening and diluting the act. They are giving indication to say 'good-bye' to the scheme. This is a serious situation."

The government has reduced the budget allocation under MNREGA for this fiscal, restricted the coverage area to few districts and changed the labour and material ration under the scheme — thereby diluting the objective of the law, he added.

CPI and other members urged the government not to undermine the law by bringing these changes and encourage "benami contractors and corruption" under the scheme.

On an average, around 5 crore households, which is close to 29 per cent of the total rural households, are provided employment under the scheme every year.

Around 54 per cent of MNREGA workers are women and close to 40 per cent are schedule caste and schedule tribes.

The Act has ensured considerable financial inclusion with around 9.76 crore accounts of MNREGA workers being in banks and post offices.

Replying to the motion, Rural Development Minister Birender Singh, however, said the MNREGA has achieved significant results in the last eight years and the continuous endeavour of the government is to "further streamline and improve" implementation of the scheme.

Satish Chandra Mishra (BSP) said government is diluting the scheme and eventually trying to wind up for the benefit of corporates.

"Are you serious about continuing the scheme?" he asked the government and demanded increasing the number of working days from the current 100 days to provide social security to poor people.

Nadimul Hague (AITC) said the government is not

"abolishing" but reducing the budget allocation for the scheme. "15 of India's leading economists have opposed revising the scheme," he said.

He sought to know why the government wants to restrict the coverage and bring down the labour-material ration from 60:40 to 51:49.

Kanimozhi (DMK) said that the minister's reply does not answer the concerns raised by members.

She said that the government should not tamper the labour-material ratio and restricting coverage area will hit states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

Kalpataru Das (BJD) raised issues related to provision of funds by the Centre to the states to meet the demands of the scheme. He also sought clarity on whether the government intends to make the MGNREGA scheme universal or restrict it to backward districts.

K C Tyagi (JD-U) said the job employment guarantee scheme was one of the good things that has happened in the recent years.

He said the focus of the current government is more towards the industrial sector and consequently less funds are being provided for MGNREGA.

Former Rural Development minister and Congress MP Jairam Ramesh said that recently several statements including those by the previous minister had created apprehensions about the priorities of the government.

He said that an impression had been formed that the government wants to implement the scheme in 2500 blocks and asked what would be the situation in the rest of the blocks.

Sukhendu Sekhar Roy (TMC) criticised the government saying it had effectively not increased the amount for the scheme from which the deprived benefited.

He also claimed that in the Prime Minister's home state of Gujarat, there is a district where the job guarantee scheme had not taken off.

Congress MP Bhalchandra Mungekar raised questions as to whether the government intends to dismantle MGNREGA.

He said such a thing (dismantling MNREGA) would be against the interests of rural, poor, SC and ST sections.

## Dictating the Culinary Choices of Students

by Janaki Nair

A recent attempt to revive culinary segregation, reportedly among the well-fed denizens of institutions of technical learning is designed to control what students eat on campus. In response to the anguished plea purportedly by some parents of youngsters who join IITs, IIMs and medical schools across the country, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), has thought fit to ask these august institutions to report as to what steps they are taking to safeguard *Bharatiya sanskriti* (Indian culture).

The immediate provocation is what the complainants call the propagation of *Paschyatik sanskriti* (western culture) through the sly introduction of eggs, meat and fish into the diets of the students. We know too well that "meatarian cuisines" are no western imposition.

The Kodavas' famed love for pork (and rum), even at weddings, may make the Rakshaks shudder, but most wedding guests are happy eating it. The Nairs and Chettiers; Mangaloreans and Kurubas; Nadars (Hindu and Christian) and Gowdas; even the Gowd Saraswats are no closet

'meatarians'. As K.S. Singh's painstaking and meticulous Peoples of India project reveals "We are largely a drinking, smoking and meat-eating people."

But it is the dangerous ignorance of what happens, and is supposed to happen, in universities that is of more interest here. For some time now, feminists, among others, have made efforts to point out that a university is not, and cannot, be a family. It is structured precisely



to encourage critical thinking about naturalised spaces such as the family, about such ascribed categories such as caste and religion.

There is much learning in universities and institutes of higher education but, equally important, there is much unlearning too — of habits, of attitudes, of stereotypes and of prejudices — as students of all castes, tribes, regions,

languages and sexualities mingle, in the process learning tolerance for others.

Tolerance is not just a passive putting up with but an active acceptance of, and engagement with, difference. This is why legions of students, in different parts of the country accept the imposition of one regional cuisine as a culinary limitation of their mess cooks, rather than as a perpetration of violence on their food cultures. They realize that new institutional spaces fashion whole new ways of being. So many students set aside their taste for mustard sauce, fermented fish, coconut gravies, and goat head curry until they can go home to satisfy their taste buds.

There are clearly many reasons to urgently educate the petitioners, especially since their ignorance contradicts the other current move to ensure a requisite level of patriotic pride in the (largely imagined) ancient past while striving to achieve global rankings. Will institutions capitulate to the new demand? Will the petitioners next demand information about the food habits of the teachers, and staff and whether they are of a *satvik* or a *tamasik* quality? We don't know yet, but if they do, it will be an aggressive assault on civilizational values, and not their protection.

## Its Not What You Know but Who You Know

by Joyeeta Dey

Currently there is a growing problem of educated unemployment. For many this education is hard won and they are not willing to settle for jobs lower than a certain status. It usually happens that in most unequal societies high status jobs are partially blocked by the social elite. Wherever the role of networking for employment's role in furthering socio-economic inequality has been researched, the relationship has been seen to be positive. In this invisible job market vacancies are not advertised so they travel internally within certain social groups and access to these social groups has been seen to be directly linked to family income.

Before exploring this idea I would like to clarify that the extent to which this contributes to the problem of educated unemployment in India is not yet known. And this is no way an attempt to take away from the conversation on the need for training in skill sets in academic courses.

Recruiters operate under a knowledge deficit because of the thinness of information available through resumes and interviews and the consequent ease of going wrong. When candidates arrive through a network of trust more is seen as accounted for. This process is seen to yield candidates of approximately the same productivity as through a 'fair' process. This spares the

organization the high cost of a recruitment process.

There is also the argument that networking itself is an important skill in the workplace and if someone has demonstrated the ability in that area it is only counted as a strength by a recruiter - an argument which may have greater moral legitimacy now with the rise of more egalitarian forums for professional networking such as LinkedIn.

The theory of weak ties states that most jobs are acquired through ones acquaintances or 'weak ties' (as opposed to family, close friends who are 'strong ties'), and they increase with increase in qualifications, showing that networking isn't merely about privilege but also involves agency. At the same much empirical evidence shows the need for a critical mass of 'contacts' to gain a reasonable chance at gaining employment.

Those 'recommending' the aspirants are often seen to experience an ego thrill out of being beneficent which comes allied with a sense of achievement at being able to do this for someone.

In the fiercely competitive race between approximate equals, introducing an edge of personal and previous acquaintance leads to enormous gain given the extent to which one's job contributes to one's social standing. On the converse side, if the job hunter

is currently unemployed there is the shame and loss of credibility that comes with it. Another thing that aids this process is the extreme endorsement for this practice that comes from nearly all quarters along with the simultaneous invisibilization of the process. That and the low need to meet those who do not benefit from this system keeps guilt at bay. Unfortunately, those who benefit from this system do so so substantially that it becomes easy to forget those out in the cold.

If we have a rare skill, or one in high demand in the economy, (such as coding) or both, then the need for this is reduced and this process can be avoided. At the same time, even if one is extremely principled, for those born into families with rich access to networks this becomes hard to avoid as some part of it is automatic.

I think an instructive example can be found in a story from post apartheid South Africa. The earlier ghettoisation had led to connections developing between rich and poor Blacks as they were enclosed in the same residential areas. After apartheid was lifted it was seen that the employment rates in poor blacks dramatically fell, as rich blacks moved into white areas. Some kinds of networking, therefore, do not *further* inequality but how far does it go to challenge its current structure?



## Caste Discrimination, Child Labour and the Nobel Prize Winner

Child labour and caste unfortunately continue to go hand in hand in India. In connection with the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to one of India's chief campaigners against child labour, Mr. Kailash Satyarthi, this issue has again been raised in global media and in expert statements. Activists and NGOs have been working for years on combatting caste-based child labour including the forms of caste-based child prostitution, Dalit children working in agriculture, manual scavenging and mining, garment, carpet weaving and construction industries.

However, as long as ingrained discrimination and stigma continue to be the cause of extreme poverty and lack of opportunities for Dalit families, finding alternative routes for Dalit children to engage in activities such as education is proving difficult to sustain.

In the article 'Poverty and caste fueling child labour in South Asia', in connection with Mr. Satyarthi's Nobel peace prize win, Harvard child labour expert, Siddharth Kara, comments that caste is a key factor underlying child labour in India. He says that, "Every single child labourer that I have documented comes from a highly impoverished family unit and belongs to a low-caste or minority community." In her statement, Stopping the small hands of slavery, Human Rights Watch South Asia

Director, Meenakshi Ganguly, also points out that caste discrimination is partly to blame for child labour in India, as discrimination pushes many Dalit children to drop out of education.

Satyarthi himself reveals that witnessing caste discrimination as a child and teenager in India were what fuelled his engagement with fighting for the rights of those who are abused and marginalised. In a New York Times article he recounts how he as a child experienced that a Dalit child did not go to school and was told that this child's caste determined that he would work as a cobbler.

Satyarthi also explains that he, as a teenager, arranged a dinner cooked by Dalits for members of dominant castes. He was infuriated when the dominant castes boycotted the dinner and subsequently shunned Satyarthi's family. This incident in fact caused him to change his then dominant caste surname to his present Satyarthi, meaning "seeker of truth".

In his work on child labour Stayarthi has inevitably continued to champion the rights of Dalit children, as do the many activists and organisations in South Asia working on the nexus of caste discrimination and child labour. But a concerted and coordinated effort from all actors International, national, government, multilateral, industry and civil society must be made in order to curb caste-based child labour in India and elsewhere.

## Decoding Modi's Broom-neeti

by Kancha Ilaiah



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is surely going to

have impact on our environment, health and education as well.

India does not have a culture of cleanliness because it suffered from the notion of indignity of labour for millennia. Those who worked and produced goods and commodities, those who cleaned and created an environment of healthy living were treated as unclean and untouchables. Those who did not produce, those who did not clean their living environment were treated as clean and sacred people.

The clean and unclean categories were constructed in the spiritual realm and later legitimised as sociological categories. The Indian Brahminic sociology created "purity" and "pollution" as socially valid categories and Indian sociologists started using concepts like "clean" and "unclean" castes. What they essentially meant was that castes that do not clean their own living environment were "clean" castes or communities, and those castes which cleaned their own living environment and that of others were "unclean" castes. This sociological language was derogatory and dehumanising.

During the 2014 election debate, when Priyanka Gandhi used the term "neech (rajneeti)", Narendra Modi understood it to mean "neech jati" and he was of the view that caste-based derogation was part of the Indian discourse. That debate is history now. The point, however, is that in Indian sociological language, those

who produce goods and commodities or those who work to keep the living environment clean have come to be known as "neech" people. Having experienced this social stigma himself, Mr Modi launched an initiative where everybody should participate in keeping their living environments clean. This certainly brings the issue of dignity of labour back into our lives.

His recent "Shramev Jayate" slogan, which is like the traditional saying of "Satyamev Jayate" will also go a long way in this process. But industrialists should not use this slogan to justify their unfair hire-and-fire policy. However, the slogan in itself is good. The notion of satya (truth) is subjective. But the function of shram is objective and verifiable. That is why teaching "Shram Gaurav" (dignity of labour) in our schools is most important to inculcate respect for shram (labour) among our future generations.

Earlier Indian Prime Ministers were keen to Sankritise (in essence, Brahminise) the state apparatus by using all Hindu mythological concepts. One should be happy that Mr Modi seems to have started changing that process. He is in a way trying to "shudra-ise" or "dalitise" the state apparatus, beginning with Delhi. One has to wait and see how far he will succeed.

This certainly poses a challenge to the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Hindu spiritual system with which his party is deeply connected. The Hindu caste culture constructed a deep disrespect for labour and constructed enormous respect for leisure. Hence, the higher layers of the society live "leisure as life" while the lower sections live "labour as life".

Unless we change the core value of this caste-centred living process, Swachh Bharat will be a distant reality.

No Congress Prime Minister has dared to venture into this areas because the same BJP, RSS would have accused them of tampering with the traditions of Hindu culture. Let us not forget that Mahatma Gandhi himself was not their icon, leave alone his respect for "Shram Sanskriti".

Yet, today, many Congress leaders sport a visible saffron thread on their wrists. While Mr Modi, quite curiously, sports only a small black thread. The younger Congressmen's display of religion is vulgar. Why have they given up the bold and truly secular lifestyle of Nehru who never used to go to any temple and was, after Gandhi, the most respected man?

In any case, now Mr Modi seems to be owning Gandhi and we have to wait and see how the RSS treats Gandhi in future.

The problem with the secularists and communists was that they could not shake anybody's tradition, right or wrong. They did not touch social reform area at all. They were always busy with economic growth and distribution. They never understood that poverty is also a cultural issue.

Till this deeply-entrenched cultural malady is not addressed seriously, the stature of the nation will not grow. If we want to see India develop, mere economic agendas are not enough. People must work for social reform, attitudinal change and Indian men particularly need to change their approach to cleanliness, public space and labour.

If Mr Modi is able to inspire the nation and solve the problem of "unclean" India, he'll truly bring in a cultural revolution.

## What Happened to in-situ Rehabilitation Policy?



The Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC) has "cleared" 35,000 metres, or 3.5 hectares (ha), of land in the Kalyan Nagar area of the slums by completely demolishing nearly 1,900 houses, leaving vulnerable residents, most of them belonging to the minority and Dalit communities, to either live in the open or go to their relatives, leaving their goods in the debris. The demolition drive, which continued for three days in the third week of November 2014, was undertaken without any official

intimation to individual residents, who lived there for the last 35-40 years. The slum-dwellers were told a night before that the demolition would take place, and that they should either vacate the huge area or their houses would be razed. Earlier, the only notice given to the residents was through a newspaper advertisement several weeks ago.

Carried out in the name of Vishwamitri riverfront development on lines of the Sabarmati riverfront development, the slum-dwellers lived

on three types of land – government owned, private, and religious trust owned. Nearly 80 per cent those whose houses were demolished are Muslims, and the rest of the 20 per cent are Dalits. Very few dwellings were left intact, as they had the "right political connection".

The demolition took place despite the Government of Gujarat's policy declaration on July 18, 2013, through a government resolution (GR), that slum-dwellers on public land in urban areas would be provided with the facility of in-situ rehabilitation, i.e. new pucca houses, with basic amenities having two rooms, kitchen, bathroom and latrine, would be built for them with the help of private developers at the same spot where they lived in the slums. The policy also states that the beneficiaries would be provided "a transit accommodation", till the houses are constructed. This has not happened either.

While the policy applies to slums situated on public lands, the authorities can, if they so wish, "notify any area in an urban area occupied by slum dwellers as a slum area and further as a 'slum rehabilitation scheme' for the purpose of rehabilitation of that slum, in exercise of powers vested under section 3(1) and section 56(1) of Gujarat Slum Areas (Improvement, Clearance and Rehabilitation) Act, 1973", to quote from the GR. The policy, apparently, remained on paper, and the VMC officials, accompanied by cops and bulldozers, cordoned the entire 35,000 sq metres of area, and within three days raze all the dwellings.

Considered one of the biggest razing drives conducted by the

civic body in the recent past, its declared aim was to clear the space on which the riverfront and a road are being planned. Before the authorities demolished the Kalyan Nagar slums, they did a similar thing in Kamati Baug area by razing 325 dwellings. The drive, the authorities claimed, was also part of their flood mitigation efforts, as these were "low-lying areas" and got flooded "frequently".

While the authorities said that the residents had been given alternative housing, there is no evidence to suggest this is true. Not only the norm of relocating them at the same site had been violated, but even their rehabilitation was not provided.

-Counterinterview.org

### Letters to Editor

Kindly mail your letters to the editor to

info@dalitcry.org

Or

post them to Dalit Cry, C/o Oliver D'Souza, Sri Radha Apartments, Flat 201, Sector 9, MM Extension, Belgaum 590016 Karnataka



## Why CBI's Badaun Suicide Story Sucks

The CBI's suicide theory about the death of two Dalit girls found hanged from a tree may have been recently revealed to the world, but the murmurs had started in Katra Sadatgunj village — the site of the "gangrape and murder" case — when the local edition of Hindi daily Dainik Jagran, quoting sources in the agency, asked in a headline: So did the two girls kill themselves?

Ask the villagers, the family of the two minor girls who died, the local police who reached the scene first, the key witness, the UP SIT that took over the case, the doctors who conducted the post-mortem and even the accused. The answer across the board — it's extremely unlikely.

Villagers questioned some of the key points that the CBI has used to prop up the suicide angle: local police said the scene at the spot on May 28 did not suggest suicide; a member of the SIT said they never heard of any mobile phone recording that suggested intimacy between the main accused and one of the victims; a key witness said he did change his statement but claimed that was a minor variation; and doctors said their findings were not as inaccurate as they were made out to be.

Yet, the most interesting reaction to the CBI's theory has come from Chhatrapal, the constable who is one of the accused in the case. He spent three months in jail, is out on bail, has lost his job and stands to gain the most from the CBI's report.

But he still can't believe it is a case of suicide.

Another villager, Veerpal, whose fields are near the mango tree and who was among the first to go to the home of the accused to search for the girls, said he was "shocked" at the suicide theory. "Here, even if a twig falls at night it seems like a loud noise, how is it that the girls hoisted themselves up the tree and committed suicide and none of us woke up?" he asked.

Veerpal and two other villagers, Vijay Singh and Ram Saran, denied being shown any mobile phone recording by the girls' family members as the CBI has claimed in its report.

However, they added, there was a video recording that the CBI played in the village "a few days before Dhanteras".

A member of the SIT constituted by UP Police told The Indian Express, "I am aware that all statements have

been recorded by CBI but this is one I am eagerly awaiting. None of the people who we questioned repeatedly made such a claim (of the recording), and it is largely these very people who the CBI roped in, on the basis of our investigations."

The SIT member added that his team "was starting to develop the honour killing and possible family dispute theories", when the CBI took over.

According to the SIT's investigations, the branches of the mango tree were around 8-10ft high, and the "manner of hanging" did not suggest suicide, the officer said. "The chappals of both the girls was neatly aligned by their bodies, and there was no rock or branch the girls would have needed to hoist themselves up. Two minors hanging like that... we suspected a homicide," he said.

Awadesh Yadav, at 22 the eldest of the three accused brothers, said that it was "hard to believe" that his younger brother would have driven the "girls to suicide".

Awadesh added that even though "our reputation has been damaged far beyond what multiple lives can undo", they would get justice only when the

real culprits were found. "The girls were wronged more than us. We suspect their family had a definite role to play."

Awadesh's father, Veerpal, questioned the CBI's theory. "Pappu told us and the police that he loved the girl, and she also loved him. Before she killed herself would she not have told him once?" he asked.

Nazru, the witness, acknowledged that he had "made slight changes" in his statement to his family when he saw the girls. "I feared that if I told them that I saw only Pappu with the girls, they would not believe me? So I said I saw four other men with Pappu to make the story more believable," he admitted.

Scared of their reaction, Nazru had also initially told the girls' family that there were robbers in the field, where he had found Pappu and the elder girl, and called for a search party. "Nazru then told us that he had been trying to tell us that the girls had gone with Pappu. God knows why he lied," the father of the younger girl said.

Nazru said he usually spent most of the evenings at the cousins' homes but added that now his "elder brothers" have asked him to "stay away" till the truth comes out.

One of the three doctors who conducted the original post-mortem in Badaun said "contrary to what is being made out", their findings did not suggest any external injuries. The cause of death in the original report was "asphyxia from ante-mortem hanging" and the doctors had said the "perineal findings were suggestive of rape".

"Whether the hanging was homicidal or suicidal is a matter of investigation. We thought we had genital findings which indicated forced penetration but we have been told forensic lab reports have found no male DNA. Let us see the closure report before we comment," the doctor said.

Girls' family members said they would appeal to the higher courts if the CBI filed a report suggesting suicide. "We are being made to look like liars when the real accused have been released. We have recounted the incident so many times, we forget minor things and people paint them as discrepancies."

Their younger brother said the theory of suicide was "laughable". "If our girls had to kill themselves, why would they do so in the dead of night at 2am in the fields? Why wouldn't they hang themselves in the privacy of their home?" **Source:** Indian Express

## New Possibilities in Bahujan Politics

by Suryakant Waghmore and S. Anand

Poverty, stigma, exclusion, violence are terms that come up during discussions on the status of Dalits. Recently, however, these have come to better describe another community: Muslims. Exclusion from higher education, government jobs, violence and normalised social disgust affecting Indian Muslims has generated enough scholarship. The state has also recognised their exclusion.

Both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claim to be concerned about the welfare of Muslims as long as Muslims do not claim their rights as Muslims. Both parties prefer them to be docile recipients of their concern — even the Narendra Modi government may not stop the subsidy for Haj. However, they expect Muslims to not take pride in their Muslimness, or link their citizenship claims to Muslimness, even as Hindus have done so. Despite their theoretically existing a 'secular' state since 1950, Sanskrit Hinduism has imprinted itself on the public sphere well before the Dinanath Batras and Smriti Iranis came to hold the reins — in police stations and government offices Hindu symbols have dominated; a statue of Manu adorns the forefront of the Jaipur High Court; new trains are flagged off with the breaking of coconuts; Brahmin priests perform bhumi pujas at almost every public-funded construction. Why, for the success of the recent Mars mission, even the ISRO chief K. Radhakrishnan sought the blessings of the Lord of Tirupati.

It is in this context that we

need to see the rise of Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM) under Asaduddin Owaisi, Member of Parliament, outside of the party's home turf in Telangana. The party fielded 24 candidates, including three Dalits, in the recent Maharashtra Assembly elections. Though many of them were debutants, two of them won, three finished as runners-up, and eight candidates took the third place. In some places, even the losing candidates fared better than the Nationalist Congress Party/Congress contestants, with MIM polling over half a million votes. The stated purpose of MIM, to serve Muslim interests with an assertive Muslim identity, is being seen as reactionary, or more precisely anti-Hindu. It seems so to most commentators, reporters and 'secularists' of even the Left. Was MIM's success in Maharashtra, which it hopes to soon replicate in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and West Bengal, based only on anti-Hindu rhetoric?

Given the resurgence of Hindutva, Mr. Owaisi and MIM may not be anti-Hindu but they surely perform pro-Muslimness best, by underscoring the need for Muslims to vote and elect their true representative through MIM. Mr. Owaisi speaks of education, poverty, and the arrests facing Muslims, and of the need for them to claim their citizenship dues under the rubric of the Constitution. For the secularists who suggest we think of all the poor as one class, MIM appears to mirror the BJP on a

smaller scale with Muslims in control. Not quite though. MIM could well steal the Bahujan Samaj Party's thunder, what with Mr. Owaisi almost talking the 'Bahujan' language of Kanshi Ram of 1990s during the post-Babri, post-Mandal phase. After tasting success in Maharashtra, Mr. Owaisi was reported saying, "We have succeeded in creating a platform for the unity of Muslims and Dalits and Other Backward Classes across the nation to raise their voices against the injustice they have been facing from the so-called secular parties."

"MIM could well steal the Bahujan Samaj Party's thunder, with Asaduddin Owaisi almost talking the 'Bahujan' language of Kanshi Ram of 1990s"

In Maharashtra, MIM managed to coin a new and interesting slogan: 'Jai Meem and Jai Bheem' — Meem here standing for Muslim, with a pun of course on MIM. While undermining the expediency of Mayawati's Dalit-Brahmin plank in 2007, this comes as a refreshing contrast to the Shiv Sena push in the 1980s for the coming together of Shiv Shakti and Bhim Shakti, that is of Hindus and Dalits, when the latter, in the post-Buddhist, post-Republican Party of India phase, had come to be wooed by the ascendant Shiv Sena in the State. The growth of MIM today is happening at a time when we have reports of how the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-BJP combine and its various arms are 'Hinduising'

the Dalits to engineer full-fledged communal violence between Hindus and Muslims.

Embedded in MIM's rhetoric are Muslim claims for social justice and citizenship. Whenever elite Indians see social justice and citizenship claims interspersed with assertions of identity, they are quick to label such political sentiments as anti-national. However, issues of inequality and justice remain intertwined with the question of social and religious identity.

Dalits may still be facing considerable indignities, violence, exclusion and humiliation had it not been for Ambedkar's politics of identity that created possibilities of justice and equality. If Ambedkar had not carved the space for an independent Dalit politics, outside of the Congress-Gandhi-Hindu fold in pre-independence India, Dalits would have gained none of the rights and entitlements they enjoy today.

This is not to undermine Ambedkar's other significant contributions towards nation-building. At the same time, we need to see his espousal of identity politics as a significant contribution to the nation-building process. After all, he saw India as "congeries of communities"; the very existence of the hierarchical caste system made this a society of teeming minorities. It is the assertion of such multiple and diverse identities, and their claims to justice, that laid the grounds for substantial political and social equality.

Ambedkar, thus, has now come to represent ideas of liberation, justice, and most impor-

tantly, hope in constitutional democracy. This calls for a purposive politics that discards assimilation and celebrates plurality of identities from the standpoint of those in the margins. However, such resistance to assimilation is generally portrayed as anti-national by the mainstream elites. When Arun Shourie wrote a full volume on Ambedkar's 'betrayal' of (the Hindu) nation in his *Worshipping False Gods* (1997), his argument was no different from what the Congress and the 'pro-nationalist' press said of Ambedkar in the 1930s.

Ambedkar, however, swam against the assimilating currents that threatened to sweep away the margins. That is why he converted to Buddhism, along with over half a million followers. He administered specific vows to his followers to distinguish them from the Hindu mainstream. The making of Dalits as a political community distinct from Hindus — "a part apart" — was thus an important part of the Dalit claim to equality and citizenship.

If excessive poverty persists amongst Muslims, coupled with everyday discrimination, what is so wrong about framing Muslim identity as one of exclusion and staking claim to social justice? The MIM may well be on the path of instilling belief in the Constitution and democracy among Muslims despite their excessive deprivations. If the idea of Muslim-led Bahujan plank swells, it can potentially transform elitist intolerance towards Muslims and more importantly ignite newer possibilities in Bahujan politics.

**Courtesy** - The Hindu



(Note: This article is a spoof, a imagination of the author. The views are of the author and not necessarily of Dalit Cry).

In a move that has taken no one, except the most gullible citizens, by surprise the public sector State Bank of India changed its name to the Seth Bank of India. The bank, which is India's largest financial institution, said in a statement that the renaming was done to better reflect the fact that it is no longer the Indian State but the Indian Seth who decides its policies.

"For a long time we have been taking deposits from the public and handing them over to the rich anyway so the new name is quite appropriate," said a senior bank official. The Seth Bank of India, he said, was also planning to change its current

slogan 'A bank for the common man' to 'A blank cheque for the con man'.

The theory behind such banking practices is that giving the money deposited by the poor or the middle-classes to rich corporations would lead to economic growth. This in turn would result in a 'trickle down' of corporate profits back to those whose hard earned money had been given away. Asked to clarify whether the key term was 'trickle' or just plain 'trick' the senior bank official refused to comment saying he was bound by banking secrecy norms, which prohibit telling the truth to Indian citizens.

The latest Seth to benefit from the bank's changed priorities is

Gautam Adani of the Adani Group which swung a USD1 billion loan for its controversial coal mining project in Australia. The decision to give such a big loan to a company already saddled with huge debts and for a venture headed for possible failure was taken after Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbot promised to give the Indian PM Narendra Modi a big 'hug' in front of media cameras for being such a sucker. Mr Adani had hugged Mr Modi in private earlier.

However, a ruling party spokesman said the decision was actually in line with a new concept called 'Vedic Capitalism', thought up by none other than Mr Modi himself. The

term apparently refers to an economic system in which things that belong to the Indian State disappear and magically appear in the pockets of an Indian Seth.

Mr Modi's idea of 'Vedic Capitalism' seems to have been inspired by Hindu mythological tales told by his grandmother and crystallised during his time as a RSS pracharak in New York couple of decades ago.

"NaMo observed how US style crony and casino capitalism worked at close quarters and was convinced that American financial 'wizards' have stolen ideas from our ancient scriptures where Gods made children appear with no parents involved and rakshasas disappear

whenever they wanted" said a yoga guru close to the current government. Vedic Capitalism would similarly involve making bad debts appear and public assets disappear with no one taking responsibility he said.

The guru, with a reputation of being as flexible with his morals as with his body, also revealed that the Indian PM had drawn up plans to recover India's position in the global economy through the practice of 'financial yoga'.

The first asana to be promoted he said was twisting the arms of all public sector banks into following the example of the Seth Bank of India. Unless these institutions stretched their imagination every morning and complied they would be forced to do a special pranayama that would stop their breathing altogether.

## Dalits, Muslims and Hindutva's Social Engineering

by Aijaz Zaka Syed

The Dalits or low caste Hindus have struggled on the margins of Indian society, suffering in silence, for thousands of years. Little has changed for the Dalits in terms of respect and societal acceptance, even under powerful Dalit parties like

the Bahujan Samaj Party. Untouchability and discrimination remains a fact of life. The sharp dividing line that separates the noble, upper caste Hindus from the Dalits remains as powerful as ever.

This shows itself from time to time and at every stage, including during elections. Since the dawn of the Mandal revolution and rise of caste-inspired parties like the BSP, Samajwadi Party and Rashtriya Janata Dal, they have largely voted according to their sectarian loyalties.

This is why it is truly extraordinary what Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party have managed to accomplish in the 2014 Elections and the subsequent state polls. The social engineering project that the Parivar has been meticulously working on for decades delivered a windfall in 2014 when the Dalits and other backward groups en masse deserted the Congress, BSP and SP to vote for Modi.

The Hindutva social engineering got a huge boost in Gujarat under Modi and was put to use with deadly efficacy in the 2002 pogrom. Hindutva leaders and BJP ministers may have choreographed the Muslim massacre, but it was mostly the Dalits and other marginalized groups, who have historically shared good relations with Muslims, who were used as the attack dogs of Hindutva.

The Muzaffarnagar riots last year that drove thousands of Muslims from their homes after their Jat neighbors, again a community historically close to Muslims, turned on them were part of the same 'social engineering' process.

Indeed, 2014 saw the peaking demonstration of the Gujarat experiment. For the first time, lower caste communities which saw the BJP as a party of the rich, upper caste Hindus, voted for it in overwhelming numbers.

Modi used the brazen bloodletting of Muslims to burnish the image of a tough, Hindutva superhero with working class roots who could also 'deal' with Muslims. Dalits and backward classes found it hard not to identify with him and his message of a "strong, clean, prosperous India". With an ostrich-like Congress in total meltdown and the rest of opposition clueless, it wasn't too difficult to connect with a disenchanted, corruption-weary voter.

So much so Mayawati's BSP has been wiped out in Uttar Pradesh and the BJP has even captured Maharashtra and Haryana on its own. More important, the much trumpeted Muslim vote has been rendered totally redundant and irrelevant. BJP candidates comfortably won even from Muslim-concentrated constituencies.

The Parivar has finally managed to 'unite' the extended Hindu family-against the enemy. After long years of indoctrination, brazen lies and continuous hate propaganda targeting Muslims, not to mention the ongoing canard of 'love jihad', large sections of the Dalits and backward communities have turned against an already demonized and marginalized minority.

## Caste Society: A Pan-Africanist View

- by Tsungai Chipato

For thousands of years thanks to our so called progression to civilization; human beings have been continuously perfecting the art of creating the ultimate chattel of ethnic groups or classes of people; generationally trapping them within a vicious cycle of exploitation or mental-subjugation.

Throughout that human history, all these different ethnicities or classes of people have been behaviorally changed or influenced toward the fundamental goals of being under the beck and call of disenfranchisement and neo-colonialism.

Discrimination and its different virulent strains of prejudice has been the most effective precept thus far; throughout our global history capable of controlling different ethnic groups of people within a finite geographical space; without having to resort to a state of violence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

This lone fundamental has not yet changed even as the old overt methods of disenfranchising groups of people has now fallen to the wayside; other more nuanced and complex systems have evolved globally, based on the same old fundamental, however, far more adept at

The alienation of Dalits and other marginalized communities not just means Muslims are left totally friendless and without allies; things could get even worse now that their votes are seen as totally worthless.

The sooner Muslims wake up to the new political realities of India the better for them. It is time for the community to urgently think of effective ways and means of ending their isolation. They must close their ranks and reach out to make new friends and win allies.

Moreover, they must ask themselves what has gone wrong in their equation with Dalits and other communities and what they could do to mend fences. They also need to build bridges with other minorities. This is not possible without sincere and bold steps.

masking the hidden agenda of exploitation and neo-colonialism.

The fundamentals of an effective caste system relies on the constant awareness of all geographical locations, control over the education pipeline, adept artistry in manipulating the religious systems, unfettered power over bread and butter economics, and influence over cultural identity issues.

Pinpointing the ethnic groups that are most susceptible to exploitation is usually taken care of by precursors to government systems voluntarily entering into unknown geographical areas. In 2014 Somalia could be a good example of uncharted territory ready for exploration, from a Western perspective.

Understanding the inherent weaknesses and taboo issues of any ethnic group is more important and telling than really analyzing and delving into every single aspect of their existence. What the ethnic group doesn't feel comfortable about talking is probably where it will hurt or sting the most if one was to attack or subject that ethnic group to a barrage of constant scrutiny.

Targeting certain geographical choke points where you can control the movements of your future colonized-group will help you begin to initiate bills and acts of psychological legislation that imbues within that specific ethnic group, a sense of worthlessness and fear; without necessarily affecting other groups within your nation.

In effect the legislature begins to create a legal-virus that can attack a specific ethnic group with no mercy, and is also equipped with the capability of easily adapting against any of the chosen methods of fighting against it, just as long as it is dedicated to devastating that specific ethnic group.

Encouraging your colonized-group to despise other ethnicities will force their own day to day interaction and social worth to become insular in philosophy and inadvertently they will, during the course of time, become very quick to

reject new ideas and slow on initiating innovation.

The marketing is finally the most difficult and tricky aspect of subjugation of any "neo-colonialist" endeavor. The term "propaganda" is now in disrepute however all its tenets are still in full use. People in power have learnt through history and patronage that violence or the consistent threat of suffering should be kept in the shadows, away from public discourse thus allowing for our own human psyche to concoct vivid imaginations of the horrors that will happen to us if we dare cross that Rubicon.

Power has now tapped into the science of coddling and manipulating bravery. In 2014 if you are not a soldier or an activist martyr it basically means that you are normal and considered a lukewarm coward. The control of utopian values and abstract ideals is no longer within the realm of common people.

As difficult as it is to believe, humanity is now in the technological feudal age of civilization. Fighting for human rights currently, should be more important than ever, nevertheless for whatever reasons or misconceptions; this is not the case.

Where race will no longer matter but the class of the person will, most of the time race gets in the way of sifting through the chaff to get to potential talent in the society. Economic-caste appears as if it may be the answer to capitalist human resource problems the world over.

Class as a caste system is the new theory that may be on the rise worldwide within the backrooms of power. Defined and bordered; by capitalism, monopolist, meritocracy, welfare and oligarchy, economic-caste may soon replace racism and become the next hegemony that people will rail against.

The funny thing about all these terms is that the basic precepts and fundamentals never change throughout the centuries, exploitation, neo-colonialism and subjugation. Some ethnic group ends up being subjugated.

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## How Kanshi Ram saw the Media

by Anil Chamadia



to ensure that they last. His speeches indicate why Kanshiram, during the initial days of his movement, laid equal stress on developing Bahujan media.

Further, a mobile exhibition on Ambedkar travelled with him. The idea was to introduce people to the contribution of Ambedkar. For him, such fairs were the primary means of communication. Kanshiram knew very well what medium would be best suited for inspiring and influencing the community he was targeting.

When he was preparing the ground for the Bahujan movement through BAMCEF, according to him, about 30% Dalits knew nothing about Ambedkar. He knew that merely introducing this section of Dalits to Ambedkar would help turn it into a potent weapon for raising political consciousness and bringing about social change.

Kanshiram also inspired confidence among his audience without the aid of the mass media. His message that Bahujans need not depend on the publications of others inspired a section of Bahujans to preserve their own literature.

When Kanshiram was touring the country to forge a common front of the Bahujans, he used to tell the audience at his public meetings that the entire Indian media was in the hands of Brahmins and Banias and that was why it neither had any place for people like him nor for movements launched by them.

According to Kanshiram, the media's policy was of 'blackmail and blackout'. "They cannot publish any news about our activities. Our second national convention was held in Delhi. It lasted five days but no newspaper published even a single line about it," he said. When the 'mainstream' media actually published news of any of his activities, he would be amazed.

Kanshiram told the Bahujan community "Daily newspapers come out every day and we read them. They influence us and bring changes in our attitude. The country's dominant classes and castes had realized this at the beginning of the British rule and surely but steadily they brought the daily newspapers under their control. Ultimately,

their control over the daily newspaper business was complete. This created many problems for the Dalit castes."

Then Kanshiram also made an appeal to the Bahujans: "Those who are saddened by the fact that the privileged, prosperous class has come to control the minds of the Dalits and the exploited lot, they will have to take some steps to remedy the situation. They will have to break the stranglehold of the dominant class on the dailies."

When he started publication of *Bahujan Sangathak*, he was well aware that it may not last more than a couple of issues. He used to say that the members of his community must have launched thousands of publications but none survived more than one or two issues. He emphasized the need to not only start publications but also

## Dalit Christians – Victims of Casteism

by Duvvuru Kamalakar

Casteism has become pervasive in Christian churches and organisations. Dalits who embraced Christianity were motivated by the fact that they would be given an equal status, value, rights and dignity. But Christian churches, organisations and the community have never lived up to their stated values of equality and dalits continue to be discriminated and excluded in churches and Christian organisations due to their caste origins.

In fact, Dalit Christians face worse discrimination than the Dalit Hindus as they are subjected to multiple discriminations: discriminated by the church and Christian organisations, discriminated by society, discriminated by the Dalits of other faiths and discriminated by the state.

The continuation of the caste system among the Christians is attributed to the nature of mass conversions of entire villages, as a result of which existing social stratification was not affected. When Christian missionaries began their work in India, their promise of equal treatment and opportunity for all castes became the prime reason for Dalits to embrace the missionary message, but caste prejudices continued.

A myth is being perpetuated that the Dalits who converted to Christianity are better placed. However, the conversion of Dalits into Christianity has no effect on their social status. A cursory examination of Dalit Christian communities in different parts of India

reveals the fact that even conversion could not change this reality.

Dalit Christians are unique in the discrimination they face in the larger society as upper-caste Indians treat Dalit Christians worse than other Dalits. In the eyes of upper castes, Dalit Christians made the "mistake" of embracing a foreign religion, in addition to their "crime" of being untouchables. This leads to double discrimination: as Dalits and as Christians.

The Indian government too discriminates against Dalit Christians as it has brought a distinction between one kind of Dalits and another, offering benefits and privileges to Dalits who are Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist, while denying them to Dalits who are Christian or Muslim. The SCs of Christianity and Islam are denied the aforementioned Constitutional privileges, with far reaching implications.

Church and Christian organisations have to understand the dual identity of Dalit Christians, and come out from their Brahminical way of looking at the issues. It is high time the leadership of such institutions drop their divisive and discriminative caste, class and patriarchal mindset to enable Dalit Christians to enjoy their human dignity, value and rights in par with others in Christ.

In order to bring the required transformation in the Christian community, Dalit Christians should be proactive. Here Ambedkar's dictum is very much relevant: "Educate, Agitate and Organise".

### Express Yourself, Voice Your Opinion

Dalit Cry invites you to express yourself and voice your opinion through articles and write-ups on issues pertaining to Dalits and Dalit-Bahujans. Please email your submission to: [info@dalitcry.org](mailto:info@dalitcry.org)

## Would Reservation Benefit Eklavya?

by Dr. Sylvia Karpagam

India is now caught between two shades of saffron – one the unsophisticated, bawdy, rabid pro-Hindutva fundamentalists, and the other even more insidious, dangerous and venomous – the pseudo sophisticated, modern academicians and self proclaimed philosophers.

This category has written books, published papers, spoken at international conferences and have even said that the 'SC/ST and Muslims' have a bad deal in this country. They will publicise atrocities committed against these two groups, they will make sure that these words get special mention in their speeches and writings, but at no point will they look at it as a human right.

They will not take it up as a life time agenda, they will not change their own 'upper caste' names, they will still attend all

those ceremonies that validate their caste status, they will still talk about discrimination as a cultural phenomenon that is best left untouched, they will still not question that they are present in overpowering numbers at decision making



bodies, they will never give up their spaces.

How long can this rhetoric go on? If you so called upper caste folk really want to practice

your inane mouthings of equality and equity, then move out actively from spaces and bring in actively, those your caste group has traditionally oppressed. This oppression has been rampant across the country, outrageous and inhuman. Stop occupying spaces.

You didn't have to mind cattle while you studied, you didn't have to drop out of school to ensure that you had water in your home, you weren't made to sit outside a classroom or wash toilets. You didn't have your house located in a colony that government officials never visited in case they got polluted by the caste you were born with.

If you had to get through all that and get into a professional situation, then surely you deserve a little more support, right? That's kind of the underlining philosophy of equity. Equity, from the point

of an 'upper' caste person is to give up something you think you deserve because of your current achievements, to undo the unfair advantages your community or your caste has received because of past (and current) human rights violations. You become accountable for what your community has done over generations. People who are 'upper caste' and who object to reservations must understand that they have won the race unfairly. They have access to the best of education, best of resources, best homes because they have attempted to destroy and dehumanize their potential competitors.

Ekalavya came up to the level of Arjun not because a system supported him. He came up entirely on merit but the

system still broke him by taking away the only thing he had. This has happened for generations and it has broken people's will and people's self esteem.

SC students commit suicide. In your heart you think "Serves Them Right For Entering My domain" and that is because you believe very intrinsically that it is your domain.

You genuinely believe in your heart that you deserve more. This is the paradigm that drives you all the time. You believe that it is your karmic position that gives you this advantage and therefore you happily accept a state of inequality.

This is the core of your belief. Think about it. Really deeply think about it and then decide.



The Badaun and Bhagana gang rapes of minor Dalit girls come to us as stark reminders of not only the horror expected when sexual violence meets caste atrocity, but also to lay bare the nature of the state machinery that protects the accused.

In the Badaun gang rape, the first report that I read suggested "the girls hanged themselves", quoting Atul Saxena, Badaun's police chief.

We also now know that the police refused to file a "missing persons" complaint, that they denied recourse to justice to the parents of the victims, that they tried their best to shield the accused.

But the reason I draw attention to this early report is to point out the easy, offhand manner in which the police force in this country deal with violence against the marginalised, especially

Dalits. Police routinely refuse to file a first information report where Dalits are murdered, and when pressed by grassroots organisations, they avoid Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code, and instead file cases under Section 174 (death under suspicious circumstances).

It is easy to condemn sexual violence in the strongest possible terms, but we should realise that we will be making no progress at all in combating rape if we do not uproot the oppressive caste system and challenge the state structure that has entered into a powerful, parasitic



relationship with caste and communal forces.

Those who are skeptical about this obvious connection might do well to remember that it is this same caste monster that kills caste-Hindu girls in the name of "honour killings".

The caste-Hindu male has a sense of entitlement over the bodies of caste-Hindu, over

the bodies of Dalit, over the bodies of Dalit women. As rape is an act of male entitlement, it becomes a dangerous weapon of war in the hands of caste-Hindu men who use sexual humiliation and violence to sustain a system that keeps intact their supremacy.

On June 4, 100 families from Bhagana in Haryana, protesting at Jantar Mantar against the gang rape of four minor Dalit girls by the dominant caste Jats, were evicted by the Delhi Police.

Not only is justice denied, but even the moral right to register a protest is being snatched away. It is not only in instances of rapes that Dalits have been denied

justice. In a massacre in Kilvenmani in 1968 that killed 44 Dalits, the Madras High Court acquitted all the accused for lack of evidence. The Patna High Court repeated this feat in its verdict in the Bathani Tola massacre (21 Dalits killed, 1996) and the Laxmanpur Bathe massacre (58 Dalits killed, 1997).

The latest in this hall of shame is the Tsundur massacre of 1991, where a few months ago the Andhra Pradesh High Court let all the accused walk free.

We must remember that the girls of Badaun and Bhagana are not only victims of the caste system and rape culture, but also a state machinery that supports this shame, and that we have to fight all these forces that keep this disgrace alive if we no longer want to be a rape nation.

## Dalit Girls in Modern Slavery in Textile Mills

The report "Flawed Fabrics" released by the India Committee on the Netherlands (ICN) and the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO), states that girls as young as 15 in South India's spinning mills are still facing appalling labour conditions that amount to forced labour. They live in very basic company-run hostels and are hardly ever allowed to leave the company compound. The researched spinning mills have Western companies and Bangladesh garment factories among their customers.

The spinning mills are found to recruit poor and marginalised girls, predominantly Dalits, by luring their families with false promises of education and proper living conditions at the hostels, as well as legal working conditions and a bonus payment, which is often not awarded once the girls finish their work. According to the report, the reality the girls are met with is often found to be a 68-hour working week, no contracts or payslips, no education and being locked inside factory and dormitory compounds during working and non-working hours.

One of the main concerns voiced by the girls interviewed is the lack of freedom to leave the hostel and factory, fear of the supervisors and missing contact with their families.

Violations of key human rights and labour rights were found to be prevalent at the mills investigated, including to freedom of movement, freedom of association and violations amounting to the conditions of forced labour.

The girls were found to be unaware of these rights or under the impression that girls could not join or form trade unions.

The researchers found that the manner in which the girls were recruited under false pretences amount to trafficking and the conditions including the physical confinement in the work location and psychological compulsion backed up by a credible threat for non-compliance, amount to forced labour.

The workers felt that the supervisors were threatening and hostile towards them and scolded them for things like asking for leave because they were ill, committing any mistake, refusing overtime or going to the toilet too often.

When the researchers asked the girls what they would like to see changed, they said they would like to be allowed to go outside, earn enough money to be able to save some up, visit their homes more often and be allowed to have a mobile phone so they could speak to their families without the presence of a supervisor.



## Patriarchy and the Dysfunction of Society

by Janet Surman

With much talk of paedophilia plus the physical and sexual mistreatment and abuse of dalit women in the news just lately (if largely because of the number of well known individuals called into question), it set me thinking about the perpetrators and why it is that so many males are drawn towards violence of this kind.

What is it about the make-up of societies around the world that spawns and breeds ongoing generations, some of whose offspring have a propensity for what the majority view as antisocial? For we are talking about a global phenomenon here; neither nationality nor religion seem to make a difference.

Patriarchy is the common factor. Nation states and wildly differing cultural societies from all continents are mostly male-oriented and hierarchical throughout. From politics and state institutions, business structures and workplaces to schools, universities and sports organisations – all know their place and the majority rarely question it.

What we have is the perpetuation of patriarchy right through society. What happens to ego, personality and character when individuals are automatically and without consideration slotted into their place in such artificial constructs? Why should one individual or a small group of individuals have so much power over so many others, creating a false perception of worthiness, ability or status?

When this relates to earnings capacity or 'standing' in one's own recognised social group, community or place of work, how does it affect self-esteem? Does this contribute



to an individual's perception of themselves as victims of society or of a system? And how does this apply differently, if it does, to male and female?

Within the hierarchy, as a group, women still fall well below the station of men in opportunity to reach the top levels in employment and in wages or salary and they still carry the greater burden of 'unpaid' work such as that done in the home, including child care and parental care.

And with this knowledge there is still a reluctance or refusal by some men in many societies to take on a share of day-to-day necessary chores which, presumably, they'd have to do if living alone. Why is there still this lingering culture of certain jobs being 'women's work'?

As for the men, who have been culturally indoctrinated in the belief that, for one reason or another, they are superior or more important, more entitled (than women), whilst at the same time being intensely aware that their place in the hierarchy is pretty low, affecting self-esteem, ego, etc.

Is this possibly a trigger to, or an excuse for the use of violence against women, against children – their own or others' and to other men physically weaker than they are?

And why would a woman choose to stay with a partner who regularly uses violence of any kind against her? Has she, too, been indoctrinated

to feel that it is down to her worth, that she deserves it?

Whatever the truth for individual examples of givers and receivers of violence something is seriously amiss in this outlook and attitude to coexistence in any kind of community or relationship. The dysfunction of so much of society is a result of unwritten laws and accepted norms of which we had no part in the making but which we are expected to accept and adopt as our own so-called customs and traditions, as our supposedly 'cultural heritage.'

The system we were born into – grew up in as children, studied in, succeeded in, failed in, struggled in, worked in, built relationships in, produced children in – shaped us and we accepted or rebelled, became acquiescent or antagonistic and we observe the results in all those around us.

Changing the conditions for ourselves and future generations means changing the system. The first priority for peaceful and productive coexistence would surely require a huge expectation of individual acceptance of and satisfaction with one's own existence and overall place within the wider community.

A strong feeling of self-worth would flow from the freedoms fought for and gained. Worth not granted from above, bestowed by a now defunct hierarchy but coming from the inner self because of personal choices made from the unlimited options available in a society built on common ownership and free access.

This is truly a paradigm shift which requires much individual consideration. It is the only way ahead for an intelligent life force intent on achieving its full potential in harmony with Gaia.



## Dalit Bahujan's Capitulation before Manuvaad

by Rajiv Kumar Yadav

When a temple in Madhubani was thoroughly washed after a visit by Bihar Chief Minister Jeetanram Manjhi, some said that the chief minister had become a victim of the system of untouchability. In a related development, BSP national general secretary Swami Prasad Maurya stirred up a hornet's nest by saying that Gauri-Ganesh should not be worshipped in marriages. But soon afterwards, BSP supremo Mayawati disassociated herself from what she termed Maurya's personal opinion.

The tradition of opposition to religious ritualism neither begins nor ends here. Indian society has seen not only debates but also movements on this issue. Such movements took place before Ambedkar and they continued after Periyar.

Now, the question is why those who raised these questions are trying to skirt them. Politics based on caste identity always stands the risk of getting absorbed in the religion. It is not a coincidence that those who raised the slogans of 'Tilak, tarazu aur talwar, inko maro jute chaar' are now talking of 'Hathi nahi Ganesh hai, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh hai'.

This is not merely about being drawn to Hindu gods and goddesses. It is about falling for soft Hindutva. Amidst the chantings of 'Hathi aage badta jayega, Brahman shankh bajayega' (The elephant will march ahead, the Brahmin will blow the couch shell), the 'hathi' actually entered the same Manuwadi enclosure from where it had set out to attain freedom. This was a Hindutva strategy of turning identity-based caste politics into the handmaiden of soft Hindutva.

For us, it should not be important if a temple is



purified after a Dalit visits it. It is a question of nation-building, which is impossible without a scientific temper. Dalit politics, which was based on opposition to Manuwadi-Brahminvadi system, had helped its supporters recognize the divisive ideology that differentiated man from man. As that politics has lost its way, it is not surprising that society is following suit.

The present protagonists of Dalit politics have realized that only ideological pronouncements won't solve the problem; a practical approach will be needed. Unless the people who have drifted away from Dalit politics and joined the ranks of those who 'feed milk to stones' do not return to its fold, its very existence would be under threat. Dalit politics faces a real threat from the disillusioned middle class that has emerged from the Dalit community. In the Lok Sabha elections, this middle class sided with Modi and helped turn the political atmosphere in his favour. The same is true of the OBCs.

The emerging middle class of the OBCs is also under the sway of the BJP. Hindutva politics draws this class towards it because it promises to solve the issues related to its identity. Those who had jumped on the Maya-Mulayam bandwagon not

because of any ideological preferences but on the question of identity – why will they remain there? Why won't they become fellow travellers with the BJP?

As for Mayawati, she had surrendered before the BJP on the issue of Periyar's statue. In 2002, the BSP government, ruling Uttar Pradesh with the support of the BJP, decided to erect a statue of Periyar at Lucknow's Ambedkar Park. The BJP and other Hindutva organizations opposed it, and the idea was quietly dropped. For the BJP and others of its ilk, Periyar's statue represents a thought, which, they feel, threatens the very existence of Indian society. It was for the same reason that these organizations had opposed a CD titled 'Teesri Azadi' in the year 2007.

Manjhi is complaining that even being the Chief Minister could not protect him from untouchability and the prevalent bias against Mahadalits. But the question which arises is why, in the first place, did he go to a temple?

When Manjhi observes that casteism's steely grip on society has not loosened even a bit, he should also realize that the temple he visited does not belong to the Indian Republic. It is a temple that is run according to the tenets of Manu, one of which is that Dalits are not allowed inside.

There is another version of what happened: the temple was not washed after he left but before he came and that he performed the puja with proper mantras and rituals.

Therefore, Manjhi should introspect as to why he went there. When he says he was treated in this manner because he is a Mahadalit, he is not wrong—just ideologically immature.

### Concern over Honor Killings

Expressing concern over the rise in 'honour killings' in Tamil Nadu, VCK leader Thol Thirumavalavan said most of the caste Hindus indulge in killing their dear ones due to psychological pressure from their community members and other intermediate castes.

Participating in a party function, Thirumavalavan said, "The caste Hindus have always been living in the constant fear of family honour getting eroded.

"For maintaining their false prejudice, they even resort to doing away with their daughter/son if they elope with a Dalit. They don't even fear or care for law when it comes to safeguarding their false prejudice."

He also said as many as twenty-six Dalits were killed during the last six months in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts and noted that atrocities against Dalits have been increasing across the State. **Source:** New Indian Express

## Dalits Warming up to BJP Worries SAD

The BJP is going all out to cash in on the 31.9 per cent huge dalit population in Punjab. One of the major indications of this move is the induction of Dalit leader Vijay Sampla into the Modi government.

This move, however, has not gone done well with the alliance partner, the Shiromani Akali Dal, which claims to be the custodian of this section and its MPs now want an audience with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The saffron party is out to play every card in this otherwise sensitive border state, where the RSS is now fully active. The BJP has taken up the cause of the deras and the RSS is now holding camps for them in the state.

After Lok Sabha elections, the Sangh has been active in rural areas of the state and has been organising camps to attract youth so as to revive the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, its unit for sikh community.

The highest dalit population resides in Ferozepur, followed by Nawanshahr, Jalandhar, Muktsar, Faridkot, Tarn Taran and Kapurthala.

Of the 117 Assembly constituencies, there are 34 reserved constituencies and of 13 Lok Sabha seats, four are reserved.

Now, in order to address the growing tension between the SAD and the BJP, Akali Dal

leaders decided to hold lunch-in meetings with the BJP leaders, but much to their dismay it was only the Akali Dal

leaders that attended the meeting. Being apprehensive about the continuation of the so called 'interminable alliance' with the BJP and with tension soaring high between the two parties, Akali MPs have sought an appointment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding state's long-pending demands and issues concerning the Sikh community.

**Source:** New Indian Express



### Dalit Officers Upset with CM?

Senior IAS and KAS officers are reportedly not cooperating with the majority of Karnataka ministers. What is worrisome for the Congress government is the disenchantment of Dalit officers who have virtually disassociated themselves from the government while an equally powerful section of senior officers from the Vokkaliga, Lingayat and Brahmin communities are at loggerheads with the CM and his camp for various reasons, claimed sources.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle a senior bureaucrat disclosed on the condition of

anonymity that generally when a Congress government comes to power, it draws its strength from Dalit officers as among the bureaucrats, Dalits constitute a large chunk though Vokkaligas, Lingayats and Brahmins are present in large numbers.

The bureaucrat further contended that Congress leaders drew strength from Dalit officers while getting minor support from the other groups. This in the past had helped the Congress to push their programmes and deliver what they had promised.

**Source:** The Deccan Chronicle

## Bid to Woo Dalits

According to the *Times of India*, the rolling out of the Bihar's development road map is a bid by the JD(U) to woo dalits, farmers and minorities.

While rolling out the plan, chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi had said that "he wishes to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor and bring poor and deprived sections to the mainstream.

Quoting former President A P J Abdul Kalam he had said that India could not develop without the progress of Bihar and urged the Centre to accord special status to the state.

The reports cites Manjhi as saying "In our journey, we are taking along people of all sections and regions. Special category status to Bihar is not just a demand, but an expression of the right to development of ten crore people of the state. This is important for setting up a network of industries, increasing job opportunities and ensuring availability of resources. We are not getting full cooperation from the Centre, but we will continue

the campaign for special status till we get our rightful due".

The ninth report card contains achievements of the government during six months with Nitish and six months with Manjhi at the helm. Nitish had earlier resigned as CM owning moral responsibility for his party's defeat in the 2014 Lok Sabha election and had hand-picked Manjhi as his successor.

The paper said "Chief Minister Manjhi admitted his government was focusing on the uplift of certain sections like youth, mahadalit, minorities and farmers through fresh measures many of which have been announced."

The daily also reported that "The CM clarified it was only in jest that he said he would not allow the seven Union ministers from Bihar to enter the state if they won't cooperate with the state government."

"They are our brothers and they would themselves feel embarrassed if they do not do anything in the interest of Bihar and I am sure they understand their responsibilities.

## SP Plans Drive to Win Over Dalits

The Samajwadi Party hopes to demolish the Bahujan Samaj Party's strongest bastion, its dalit votebank, with a sustained campaign beginning in December.

If these plans translate into reality, the BSP should be prepared for a major shock in the next election.

SP MLA Subhash Pasi, who heads the party's SC/ST cell said he will soon launch a campaign to bring dalits into the SP's fold and dispel the belief that dalits backed the BSP alone.

"In mid-December, we will hold a convention of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Lucknow in which CM Akhilesh Yadav and party president Mulayam

Singh Yadav will be the main speakers."

"We will invite all caste groups in SC/ST category to attend it," he said.

After the convention, where the SP will throw open its doors to dalits formally, and assure them their interests

will be protected in the SP, Mr Pasi and his wife Reena will start touring the state with their supporters.

Mr Pasi, who heads an NGO, Akshar Foundation, which works in collaboration with the Nargis Dutt Foundation in Mumbai, will launch ambulances that will visit dalit-dominated localities.

**Source:** The Deccan Chronicle





## An Untouchables' Complaint

by Hira Dom Translation: ©Ashish Alexander

Day and night we suffer	The rulers descend with a splendid retinue
We will take our plea to the Sahib	They'd grab us now to work as bonded labour
Even the gods consider not our sorrows	With sealed lips we carry on working
How long do we have to suffer	All this we will report to the government
We shall go to the court of the pastor ( <i>padari</i> )	We shall not go begging like the Brahmin
We shall apostatise and become English	We shall not wield sticks like the Thakurs
Hey Ram! Leaving religion is so hard	We shall not hold scales like the Sahu
How shameful to change religion!	We shall not graze cows like the Ahir
	We shall not write poetry like a Bhat
You shattered the pillar and saved Prahlad	We shall not wear turban and go to courts
Rescued the Elephant King from the jaws of the Crocodile	We shall earn by the sweat of our brow
Duryodhan's brother was pulling it off	At home we will share and eat with all
You appeared and extended the end of the sari	Our body is made of flesh and bones
You killed Ravan and protected Vibhishan	And so is a Brahmin's
On the little finger, you lifted the mountain	But he is worshipped in every home
Where are you sleeping now and not hearing us	And the whole land has become his <i>jajmani</i>
Are you scared too of a Dom's touch?	We are forbidden from going near the well
Day and night we labour	We drink fetching water out of mud
To receive two rupees a month	If we go near wells we are whipped, our limbs broken
The landlord sleeps cosily in his house	Why should we be harassed so much?
While we plough the farm to earn from it	

## Dalit Girls Abducted and Converted in Pakistan

by Chander Kohli

In Pakistan, the largest minority is Hindus with a population of about seven million, over 85% of them being dalits. As elsewhere in the sub-continent, dalits here too continue to face atrocities and discrimination.

School-going dalit girls are a particularly vulnerable group who suffer abduction, rape and subsequent forceful conversion.

Although by law a minor cannot change religions or get married until attaining the age of an adult, during the last one and a half month 9 cases of abduction, rape and conversion of minor dalit girls has occurred in the Sindh and Punjab provinces.



In all these cases, the police have turned a blind eye, siding with perpetrators of the crimes,

refusing to register FIRs and asking the victims to resolve matters with the perpetrators of the crimes.

In order to get justice, the parents of the victims have to go through a lot of hardship, having to sell their livestock to get the money needed to approach the courts.

When the matter is indeed taken up by the courts, the victims and their families are threatened by the perpetrators.

The threats include threat to murder the victims and also to abduct and forcefully convert sisters of the victims.

## Discrimination continues against Dalits in Nepal

Dalit communities, the lowest of the 100 caste groups in Nepal, continue to be marginalized, despite the fact that caste based discrimination was abolished in 1963, activists say.

"Untouchability and discrimination were legitimized by the state over a century ago," said Bhakta Biswakarma, national head of the advocacy group, Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO).

"Today we see the state doing little to change the situation. Discrimination against the dalit as the untouchable caste is still practised so rigidly - especially in the remote areas."

The 1854 Civil Code, introduced by the Rana regime, explicitly declared the dalits untouchable, the lowest status within the Hindu social hierarchical structure. This imposed strict regulations on where dalits

were allowed to live (they could not enter temples or use the same tap water as higher castes), forbade them from education and from participating in community festivals.

Those who defied the law of untouchability were punished; the state imposed the practice of discrimination on society, said Suman Poudel, an official with the Dalit NGO Federation (DNF).

Little has changed for the estimated 23 dalit communities in the country's hill and Terai regions, despite the propagation of legal rights.

Dalit communities have the lowest human development rankings in the country: 49.2 percent live below the poverty line compared with a national average of 31 percent, according to the World Bank.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) says

discriminatory labour practices persist in the Terai, where the majority of dalits live. During annual harvest seasons (March-May and September-November), high-caste landlords reportedly continue to use debt bondage to secure unpaid labour from Dalit labourers.

In the Terai, many dalits are landless and live on less than US\$1 a day, Poudel said, while UNDP assessments reveal that their annual per capita income is less than half that of higher castes (\$764 to \$1,848) across the rest of the country.

With a literacy rate of less than 33.5 percent above grade six (against 67.5 percent among higher-caste Brahmins), and high rates of school dropout, improving the social condition of dalit communities is a challenge.

And while caste discrimination was officially abolished in 1963, experts say the government has been weak in enforcing the ban.

## A Thousand Dalits Abroad

by Chandra Bhan Prasad

Over 100,000 Indian students are going to the United States, England, Australia and Russia for education every year. Upon return, most get top jobs immediately and some even settle abroad itself. I know a few dalit students who are studying in the US and know some who are trying to.

But, sure enough, it is not feasible for a variety of reasons, sponsorship being one of them. A four-year B.Tech course in the US, for instance, requires over Rs 50,00,000. The same goes in England or Australia.

The question is — how many Dalit parents can afford to send at least one of their children to study abroad?

Not many. There is a way out however: Scholarships. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment currently has an overseas scholarship programme for dalit students. But they are few in numbers - just 27 Fellowships are set aside for Dalits every year.

The government of India should increase it to include at least 1000 dalit students for fellowships for studies abroad.

The dalits are at a turning point in their journey to freedom. Thanks to affirmative action, a tiny dalit middle class has come into being. Post the reforms of 1990, this section is gradually evolving through their forays in entrepreneurships. Almost extraordinarily, the children of

the dalit middle class are also competing with and superseding the children of upper castes.

The Overseas Fellowships will be financial support schemes. Dalit students will have to qualify for admissions on their own without any

'Affirmative Action' in the admission criterion.

A 1000 Overseas Fellowships to dalit/ adivasi

students would mean 840 fellowships to the dalit aspirants. The UPSC recruits about 1000 civil servants every year whereas, the dalits' share is just 160 seats.

If the 840 Overseas Fellowships turn into a reality, then the success rates of winning these fellowships will be much higher than the success rate in civil services.

The consequences can be truly emancipatory. Thousands of Dalit youths who compete for civil service posts might turn towards Overseas Fellowships.

If these thousand fellowships are provided for dalits in the country, then within a decade, thousands of dalit students will turn into role models globally.

What Affirmative Action has meant to the Dalits in over half a century, the Overseas Fellowships will have done much more within a couple of decades.



## Bangladesh NHRC Calls for Law against Discrimination

The passage of an antidiscrimination act will not fix the discriminatory mindsets of people but it will prevent them from acting on their predispositions says Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman.

While the law would be a milestone towards ensuring the rights of dalits, a discrimination-free society will require broadening of people's minds, he told a roundtable on the human rights and social dignity of the Dalit people, at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

In June, the Law Commission recommended formulation of a law to prevent discrimination against dalits, adivasis, cleaners, tea-garden labourers, hermaphrodites (hijras), people with disabilities, and sex workers, but no visible step has been taken yet.

According to the recommendations, the law would provide for a fine of up to Tk 10 lakh or 10 years' imprisonment to anyone guilty

of committing an act of discrimination.

The NHRC chief said the initiative did not come from the government, but people. He said that though the dalit people cleaned the whole city, they did not get the full payment, as they were not officially employed. "Bangalee sub-contractors always skim off the top of their salary," he added.

Urging immediate passing of the law, ActionAid Bangladesh's Executive Board Member M Hafizuddin Khan said the conscious people must see to it that the act was enforced.

Taposhi Sarkar, secretary of Nari Antyaja Parishad, said her people, dalits, were treated as untouchables almost everywhere in the country. "

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