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Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies

Protests in India as rights activists placed under house arrest p. 2



Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation www.sgrhf.org.pk

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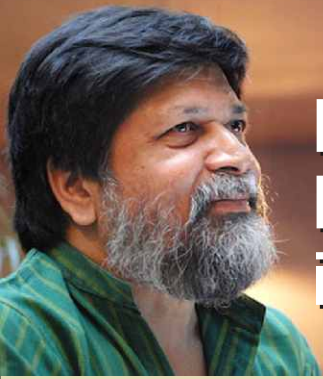


Editorial

Dowry system is an old age system and is a peculiar phenomenon of the Indian Society. The practice of dowry abuse is on the rise in India. It is the deep rooted prejudices against women in Indian culture. Payment of dowry is serving as a death warrants for women in India. Dowry is the main factor to India's gender imbalance. There is a direct link between fluctuation in global gold price and survival rates of baby girl. With the increase of gold price there is every likelihood that girls are aborted in the first month of their life and if born their growth is stunted due to non provision of key nutrients in their early age. The reaction of parents to rising cost of dowries is that they are reducing the chance of baby girl survival resulting in distorted gender imbalance. Dowry has become a cause of oppression and exploitation of the worst order. According to National Crime Records Bureau women die every week due to dowry harassment, they are either murdered or compelled to take their life. Although since 1961 dowry has been illegal in India, yet it is widespread

and a severe financial burden on families. Across South Asia studies shows that dowry payments is almost proportional with gold price. Dowry prohibition is not working and in order to weaken this practice, women should be given economic independence and changing property rights. Dowry system is playing havoc with the lives of young girls. The need of the hour is the social awareness at least among the female. More stringent laws, more education to girls, more self dependence of the girls, a social awakening can curb this ever increasing evil and social norms. A ray of hope has arisen for Indian scavengers. They can now escape dirty work through new training project, the first of its kind in India. This project aims to help scavengers to get rid of toilet and sewer and lead a life of dignity and self respect after years of internalized discrimination. They will be trained as housekeeper so that they can find jobs in hotels, hospitals, restaurants and government offices on salaries ranging from 12000 to 16000 as compared to £3 they are currently earning in scavenging. This degrading work is going on across India although it was outlawed 25 years ago. India's Socio-economic caste census 2011 found 180,000 families engaged in manual scavenging in rural area and if urban area is included it will exceed to one million. The loss of self- confidence due to internalized discrimination has gone to such an extent that they feel themselves worthless and cannot believe that anyone can take interest in their well-being. The news of training project where scavenger families are getting training is spreading and if it picks up all over India there is a great hope and chances of death of this inhuman work in India.

Editor



Bangladesh: In advance of bail hearing, PEN reiterates its call for Shahidul Alam's immediate and unconditional release



10 September 2018 - PEN International and PEN Bangladesh are deeply concerned that Shahidul Alam, the renowned Bangladeshi photographer and writer, remains under detention in Dhaka one month after his arrest on 5 August 2018. While it is noted that the conditions in which he is held may improve following a court order on 5 September 2018, which changes his classification as an under-trial prisoner, entitling him to a bed with mattress, a table and a chair, the organisation maintains that he should never have been detained in the first place. PEN International and PEN Bangladesh reiterate their call for his immediate and unconditional release. Bangladesh must live up to its international and constitutional human rights obligations, as UN Special Rapporteurs have stressed.

"It is time for Bangladesh to stop this ordeal," said Salil Tripathi, chair of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee. *"The Bangladeshi government is digging deep and casting a wide net in the hope of finding reasons to charge Shahidul Alam because it has no plausible reason to arrest him. Alam's criticism of the government's conduct is entirely in line with his constitutional right to free expression. He has expressed his views peacefully and not said anything that might provoke violence. There has been violence on the streets against journalists and students and the Bangladeshi government is required to investigate who is responsible for that violence. There is considerable photographic and video evidence of that, including attacks on journalists. Bangladesh should withdraw all false cases and ensure safety for Alam, his family and his colleagues."*

Notable photographer, writer and activist, Shahidul Alam was arrested at his home in Dhanmondi, in Dhaka, by men in plainclothes on the night of 5 August 2018 shortly after giving an interview with Al Jazeera about road safety protests taking place in Dhaka. He stands accused of "making provocative comments" and "giving false information" to the media, under Section 57 of Bangladesh's draconian Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (ICT Act) (amended in 2013 to remove certain safeguards), which carries up to 14 years in prison. Alam was

remanded in custody by the Detective Branch of the police pending the completion of the police's investigation; his detention was extended until a bail hearing scheduled for 11 September 2018.

Successive legal petitions to advance the bail hearing have been denied. In a puzzling development, on 4 September 2018 a court in Dhaka declined to hear Alam's bail petition as a presiding judge said he was 'embarrassed' without revealing the cause of the "embarrassment". The decision further postpones Alam's bail application, thus effectively extending his detention.

The Government has reportedly claimed that Alam has not been tortured, but has failed to date to conduct any independent investigation into his statement regarding torture. According to his legal team, medical examinations held have not followed any of the known protocols for victims of torture.

PEN International and PEN Bangladesh are deeply concerned about reports of unsubstantiated allegations being made against Alam in the media and on social media, which



appear intended at falsifying his record as a human rights defender. Alam is an award-winning photographer and writer who has campaigned for justice for all, including victims of war crimes and Bangladesh's besieged bloggers and has brought together the first archive of photographs of the 1971 war of independence. In a country where the state has repeatedly failed to protect thinkers, writers and bloggers targeted and violently attacked by groups ill-informed and ignorant about their work, PEN International and PEN Bangladesh fear that the repetition and spread of unfounded allegations put Alam at risk of violent reprisals.

Source: Pen International

Protests in India as rights activists placed under house arrest

Government accused of trying to silence critics after five accused of Maoist links.

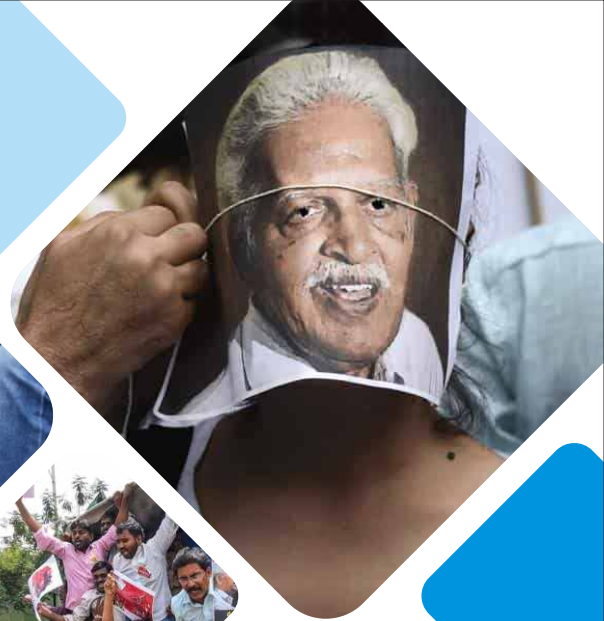
Five prominent human rights activists have been placed under house arrest for alleged links to Maoist insurgents, drawing accusations that the Narendra Modi government is moving to silence critics in the run-up to next year's national elections in India.

The five were arrested in simultaneous raids across India as a part of an investigation into a march in December by low-caste Dalit groups that was attacked by rightwing Hindu activists and escalated into full-blown riots that shut down parts of Mumbai.

The arrests sparked protests in Delhi and Mumbai and were condemned by prominent writers and activists. "This is absolutely chilling," tweeted the historian Ramachandra Guha. "The supreme court must intervene to stop this persecution and harassment of independent voices."

Arundhati Roy, the Booker prize-winning author, said: "It is in preparation for the coming elections. It is as close to a declaration of an emergency as we are going to get."

The arrests sparked protests in Delhi and Mumbai and were condemned by prominent writers and activists. "This is absolutely chilling," tweeted the historian Ramachandra Guha. "The supreme court must intervene to stop this persecution and harassment of independent voices."



The supreme court ordered the group to be released from police custody and put into house arrest until the police could present evidence.

Vrinda Grover, the lawyer who represented the group in the supreme court, said the decision to put



Police detain a protester during a demonstration against the arrest of the poet Varavara Rao in Hyderabad, India.

them under house arrest showed, that the court recognised "the larger issue at risk here, which is the threat to fundamental freedoms".

One judge, DY Chandrachud, reportedly remarked during the hearing: "Dissent is the safety valve of democracy. If dissent is not allowed then the pressure cooker may burst."

Grover added: "These are well-known human rights defenders who have an ideological position which is at variance with the state, they espouse the cause of the weak and marginalised."



Police seized laptops and mobile phones and asked for passwords from Sudha Bharadwaj, a trade unionist and law professor who was among those arrested.

The US-born Bharadwaj, 56, has spent years working on political campaigns with marginalised tribal communities in Chhattisgarh, work that has often pitted her against the government and mining interests in the mineral-rich state.

“The effort is whatever is the opposition to this regime, whether it is workers’ rights, tribal rights, everybody who in the opposition is being rounded up,” she told reporters outside her home in Faridabad, a short distance from Delhi.

The others arrested were Varavara Rao, a prominent poet from the southern city of Hyderabad, the activists Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira from Mumbai and Gautam Navlakha, a civil liberties activist from Delhi.

“The accused are booked under the unlawful activities prevention act,” a police officer in the western city of Pune told Reuters.

He said the groups were involved in making provocative speeches before the Dalit rally on 31 December last year. The event commemorated a 200-year-old

battle in which low-caste Indians joined forces with the colonial British army to defeat a Hindu ruler, whom the Dalits accused of mistreating them.

The Dalit protests that followed the attacks on the march in December were considered politically sensitive for India’s Hindu nationalist government, which aims to unite all Hindus under one political banner.

The five arrested all work with marginalised low-caste and tribal groups, supporters of whom are often accused of links to militant Maoist groups who have been fighting an insurgency inside India for more than half a century.

A report submitted to the government by the Pune police claimed the groups belong to various organisations “with linkages to the Communist Party of India [Maoists]”.

Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the main opposition Congress party, said the raids showed that the government had little tolerance for dissenting

voices.

“Shut down all other NGOs. Jail all activists and shoot those that complain. Welcome to the new India,” he tweeted.

Source: The Guardian



Activists protest against the arrests in New Delhi. Photograph: Harish Tyagi/EPA

The Dalit protests that followed the attacks on the march in December were considered politically sensitive for India’s Hindu nationalist government, which aims to unite all Hindus under one political banner.



Australian Parliament passes motion on caste-based discrimination

The Australian Parliament has passed a landmark motion urging the Government to take action on fighting caste-based discrimination. The motion requests the government to consider interventions in inclusion and non-discrimination in humanitarian aid; inclusive recruitment practice and management practice in all business partners and strengthening policy and human rights dialogues for the elimination of caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The motion also urges the Government to support projects combating caste-based discrimination through Australian International Development Programmes.

The motion was passed on 27th June 2018 and moved by Senators Claire Moore and Lee Rhiannon. It states that

- (i) over 260 million people across the globe, including around 210 million Dalits in South Asia, face Discrimination based on Work and Descent including caste and untouchability (DWD),
- (ii) as well as South Asia, significant communities also live in Japan (Burakumin), Africa, Latin America (Quilombo) and Europe (Romani),
- (iii) these communities, considered as 'lower' in status or 'impure', are isolated physically, socially and politically from other communities and are structurally excluded,

- discriminated against and are victims of violence,
- (iv) Dalit women face particularly severe forms of violence including sexual harassment, rape and murder,
- (v) Dalit children and young people face discrimination in education and employment and opportunities,
- (vi) the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates bonded labour victims in South Asia includes Dalits and is particularly widespread in the mining, agriculture and garment production industries, and
- (vii) even though some of these countries have constitutional provisions, they lack strong legal and legislative measures to address these concerns of exclusion and violence Dalit and particularly Dalit Women, face;

The motion furthermore asks that “the Sustainable Development Goals agenda recognises the need to reduce inequalities based on or aggravated by discrimination based on work and descent as a crucial and measurable goal.” It also notes that while some countries are taking progressive steps towards the elimination caste systems, like India and Nepal, functioning structural mechanisms to ensuring legal and legislative rights especially against violence and discrimination for Dalits and Dalit women are lacking.

The motion comes following advocacy efforts by the Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) to sensitise politicians and officials in Australia to caste-based discrimination. Dalit rights advocacy groups including IDSN and ADRF, have been working for many years to step up global action, solidarity and support in the fight against caste discrimination and this motion represents another step in the right direction.

Source: International Dalit Solidarity Network



Dowries a major contributor to India's gender imbalance, researchers find



Study identifies link between fluctuations in global gold price and survival rates among baby girls.

Girls born in India when the global gold price is increasing are more likely to be aborted, die in the first month of life or suffer from stunted growth, researchers have found.

A study analysed birth cohort data over a 35-year period alongside monthly variations in the global price of gold, a key element of dowries paid by a bride's family. It found that in months when the gold price went up, fewer baby girls survived the first month of life.

Parents were responding to the rising cost of dowries by reducing the chances of a baby girl surviving, according to the research, which concluded that dowries are a significant contributor to the country's skewed gender ratio.

The analysis, which included a representative sample of more than 100,000 births, found inflated gold prices correlated with improved survival chance for boys relative to girls.

Between 1972 and 1985, a 1% increase in gold prices is estimated to have caused an additional 13,000 neonatal deaths among girls each year. This estimation is based on data from 1980, when there were roughly 30 million births in India.

Women born in months when the gold price was inflated were also shorter in adulthood, suggesting their growth was stunted because they had been deprived of key nutrients early in life. This was not observed for boys born at times of inflated gold prices.

Behaviour patterns appeared to change after 1985, when ultrasound scans, which show the sex of a foetus, became widely available, said Sonia Bhalotra, professor of economics at the University of Essex, who conducted the study.

"We find that parents are consistently 'eliminating' girls early in life, but the pattern is that this is done soon after birth before 1985 and while the girl is in the womb after 1985," said Bhalotra.

After 1985, a 1% rise in the global price of gold led to an extra 33,000 "missing" female births each year. This estimation is based on data for 1995, when there were

roughly 27 million births in India.

Tests to determine a foetus' sex are illegal in India, but it is common for families to pay doctors for this service. "There's always an underground abortion clinic that will do it for you," Bhalotra said.

Though dowries have been illegal since 1961, they remain widespread in India, where they place a severe financial burden on families. Across south Asia, dowries can cost about six times the average annual household income. The study shows that dowry payments rise almost proportionally with gold prices.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 7,634 women died in 2015 20 every day due to dowry harassment. This includes women who were either murdered or felt compelled to take their own lives.

Census figures for 2011 show a skewed gender ratio: there were 914 girls to every 1,000 boys for children up to the age of six. In some northern states the ratio dropped below 850.

In 2015, the government launched a national campaign to tackle the preference for boys, promising stronger enforcement of laws that forbid sex-selective abortion and diagnostic techniques used for female foeticide, in addition to promoting girls' schooling.

Dowry prohibition isn't working, partly because the dowry transfer between families is so hard to monitor, said Bhalotra. Giving women economic independence and changing property rights may gradually help to weaken the practice, she added.

"[Parents can] say: 'I'm not giving you a dowry because she has a job as good as the man's,'" said Bhalotra.

"It is much harder to change social norms when people are older, but experimental research suggests that gender sensitisation in primary and secondary school may modify attitudes."

Some Indian states have explored other ways to incentivise families to have daughters, such as giving each baby girl a fund that matures when she turns 18.

While progress has been made in improving access to education for girls, said Bhalotra, work participation rates remain low, especially for poorer women.

Source: The Guardian

Mugu municipality helps Dalit student pursue his dream



By: Raj Bahadur Shahi

Chhayanath Municipality in Mugu district has helped Devi Krishna BK of Dhum village, a student from an impoverished family, to study dental medicine in Bangladesh.

Having already provided Rs 500,000 for his first year of study, the municipality is arranging as much amount for the second year. Kali BK, Devi Krishna's mother, said that she was able to send her son to Bangladesh following help from the municipality.

"I have taken loans for my son's study. My son has assured to do service in the village after completing his course," said Kali, who's family members make a living as daily wage earners.

According to her, around Rs 2.4 million was needed for her son's studies. "I asked the municipal office for help to fund my son's studies," said Kali. Mayor Hari Jang Shahi said the municipal office provided Rs 500,000 to Devi Krishna for his tuition fees and meals in the first year. "For the second year, we will provide another Rs 500,000," said Shahi.

Shahi added that the municipality has a policy to help students of impoverished families for their higher technical education after they passed their entrance exams.

"The municipality decided to manage funds for the

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impoverished students after they were selected for MBBS, pilot and engineering courses," said Shahi, adding that the municipality has set aside a fund of Rs 900,000 for poor meritorious students in the current fiscal year.

Officials said that Devi Krishna is the first medical student of Dalit community in the municipality.

Source: Kathmandu Post



Non-Brahmins must get highly educated and occupy the strategically important places, which has remained the monopoly of Brahmins since long.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

'I hated the stench and filth': India's scavengers escape dirty work



A project in Delhi is retraining people who clean human excrement with their bare hands to find work as housekeepers.

During Baby's nine years as a scavenger removing human excrement from dry toilets, no one gave her rubber gloves or protective clothing, as required by law.

Now she is getting training as a housekeeper and learning how to sweep and mop floors and understands the importance of wearing rubber gloves, a mask and an apron.

"I hated my work but I had to do it. There was no choice," says 49-year-old Baby, her only name. "The contractor never gave me anything to protect me from the stench and filth."

Timid and reticent, she does not enjoy talking about her work. Her children are under strict instructions never to reveal it to their teachers or friends lest they are shunned. If landlords hear, the family will not be able to rent a room.

Baby is attending day three of the course, the first of its kind in India, which aims to help 28 scavengers of toilets and sewers find a new life of dignity and self-respect. In a section of the district magistrate's complex in

"I hated my work but I had to do it. There was no choice," says 49-year-old Baby, her only name. "The contractor never gave me anything to protect me from the stench and filth."

Shahdara, east Delhi, a classroom has been readied. An adjoining room has been converted into a makeshift house with bed, fridge, washing

machine, detergents and cleaning paraphernalia, and crockery.

"Start sweeping from the corners towards the centre of the room. When you mop, wring the cloth



A labourer cleans an underground drain in Kolkata.

properly. And remember, dusting is done after sweeping and mopping," says trainer Shushma Kherwal.

Kushal Kumar, a stocky 36-year-old, grabbed the chance to attend the training because he was determined to free his two sons from the destiny that had befallen his father and then him. More confident than the others, he pulls out the nozzle of a vacuum cleaner from under a shelf and looks at it, confused. "We will come to that later," Kherwal tells him.

While Baby cleans the dry latrines of homes - toilets not connected to sewers or water - her husband Ramesh tackles blocked municipal sewers. When a contractor hires him, Ramesh strips to his underpants and lowers himself into a manhole until he is up to his neck in filth. He usually downs a quart of cheap, rough whisky to deaden his senses.

He scoops out the sludge that has blocked the sewer

and throws it into a pail that has been lowered with a rope. Deaths from inhaling poisonous gases are frequent across India, even in the capital, New Delhi. The Delhi government only recently purchased 200 mechanised machines for unblocking sewers.



For three months the trainees will learn how to become housekeepers so they can work in small hotels, hospitals, restaurants and government offices on salaries ranging from 12,000 rupees (£130) a month to 16,000 rupees (£170), as opposed to the £3 they currently earn on the days they find work as scavengers.

The training is the result of Shahdara district magistrate Kumar Mahesh's determination to end manual scavenging. Unlike other bureaucrats who do not know how many scavengers work in their areas, Mahesh has chosen to be proactive. He is personally ashamed that this degrading work continues across India 25 years after it was outlawed.

These men and women occupy the lowest depths of Indian society. I should not be singled out for doing this. It's my job and my duty," he says. In fact, Kumar has urged the trainees to bring any of their children who are over the age of 18 so they can also train to be housekeepers, or learn to use computers.

He freed up two rooms in the building so that the NGO in charge of the training, the Sadik Masih Medical Social Servant Society, did not have to rent space.

India's Socio Economic Caste Census of 2011 found more than 180,000 families in rural areas were

India's Socio Economic Caste Census of 2011 found more than 180,000 families in rural areas were engaged in manual scavenging. Activists say that if you add urban areas, the real figure is more than one million. These men and women occupy the lowest depths of Indian society.

believe that anyone could take an interest in their wellbeing without an ulterior motive. Most are Dalits (considered the lowest caste in India) which adds yet another layer of low self-worth.

News of the training is spreading. The Delhi government has promised to help expand the training to more manual scavengers. The target for the pilot project is to reach 50 people. Vinay Stephen of the Sadik Masih Medical Social Servant Society says he is getting calls from officials in other states who are interested in setting up similar projects.

"If this is picked up all over the country, I am hoping we will see the death of this inhuman work in my lifetime.

engaged in manual scavenging. Activists say that if you add urban areas, the real figure is more than one million.

Mahesh's team found it hard to identify manual scavengers in Shahdara as many are too ashamed to admit their occupation. But they finally managed to persuade 28 people to enrol for

the part-time course.

They heard the word 'cleaning' and thought we were going to offer them the same filthy work," says Rajesh Singh, the project manager. "It was only when we explained it would be a clean and respectable job, with a smart uniform and a decent regular salary, then they became more positive."

Their suspicions also arose from the fact of having internalised discrimination to such an extent that they feel worthless and cannot

Source: The Guardian

Percentage share of women employees saw a significant increase of 34.26pc in 2016-17



Of the total 649,176 sanctioned posts in the federal government, only 5.48pc are currently occupied by women and 2.82pc by non-Muslims

As per the Establishment Division's statistical bulletin about the employees of the federal government and its autonomous bodies for 2016-17, the total number of sanctioned posts are 649,176, but 78,623 of them are lying vacant, leaving the departments to function with 570,553 employees only.

Interestingly, as per the analysis, the actual strength of women employees stands at 31,281- even less than the number of vacant positions. However, the percentage share of women employees saw a significant increase of 34.26pc in 2016-17, as opposed to 7.7pc (23,298 women employees) in the previous year.

Reluctance to hire women because they won't continue in civil service is cited as one of the reasons for the situation

The bulletin shows that out of the existing strength of 31,281 women officers, 1,246 are working in the main secretariat while 30,035 occupy positions in attached departments and subordinate offices.

The analysis reveals that among the 1,246 female employees working in the main secretariat, Punjab has the largest share at 73.68pc (including 8.43pc in Islamabad) followed by Sindh at 12.76pc (4.65pc for rural and 8.11pc urban). Percentage of women employees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) stands at 7.9pc while Balochistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have 1.93pc and 1.77pc share, respectively. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) cover 1.36pc of the quota and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) 0.56pc at the bottom of the share.

Of the 30,035 female employees working in attached departments and subordinate offices, the largest share of 58.70pc goes to Punjab (including 7.57pc in Islamabad), while Sindh has 13.09pc, GB 16.12pc, KP 7.33pc and Balochistan 2.52pc. A tepid share of 1.32pc and 0.92pc is covered by AJK and Fata, respectively.

Talking about the gender disparity in public offices, former federal secretary Rukhsana Shah explained that there was a general reluctance to hire women on the posts owing to the mindset that women will not continue work.

The huge backlog, she said, could be reduced by introducing more technical cadres, including food and environment inspectors to encourage women joining the workforce. Majority of the female officers (Grade 16 and 17) were working as teachers, psychologists or nurses,

added Ms Shah, suggesting that the public commission should make the environment more favourable to women.

Given the increase in the percentage share of female employees in the past year, she pointed out that Punjab was progressing in this regard as it had also increased the job quota for women. "Just recently, a woman (Maria Mahmood) took charge as Pakpattan district police officer," said Ms Shah.

However, earlier this year, a parliamentary panel learned that despite women having a 10pc and minorities a 5pc quota from the overall share of provinces (excluding merit), around 100 seats of the Central Superior Services (CSS) allotted to minorities and women went unfilled in 2016.

According to former civil servant Syed Saadat, women quotas often remain unfilled owing to cultural barriers.

Speaking to Dawn, he pointed out that women do well in the CSS and were, in fact, edging out men. "However, there is a hesitation to serve on tough postings or in remote towns and the government offices do not have conducive environment for women that impedes career progress," he regretted.

In 2016, the top three positions of the CSS exam were taken by women. Out of the 85 female applicants, 84 were recommended for appointments. Similarly in 2017, out of the 111 females - who cleared the exams - 106 were recommended for appointments.

Non-Muslim employees

Out of the total strength of 16,133 (2.8pc) federal government's non-Muslim employees, a sizable number of 14,730 (91.3pc) are Christians, whereas 224 (1.4pc) are Ahmadis, 956 (5.9pc) are Hindus (caste), 176 (1.0pc) are Hindus (non-caste), 13 (0.1pc) are Sikhs and 34 (0.2pc) belong to the other religions.

Of the total number of non-Muslim employees, Punjab combined with Islamabad has the highest share of minority quota with 10,405 officers - including 10,114 Christians out of the 14,730 and 176 Ahmadis of the total 224 working in the federal government.

Sindh, on the other hand, has the most Hindu (caste and non-caste) employees with its workforce comprising 916 Hindu officers. KP has the highest number (seven out of total 13) of Sikh officers under its belt.

Source: Dawn

Class act: the great Dalit fight back that started in the schoolroom

A network of free after-school coaching classes for Dalits is just one way that India's lowest caste is raising its sights.

When he was 14, Govind Gyan Chand started attending the large school near his village. In the first week, some upper-caste boys took him aside and asked him about his caste. He told them he was Dalit, considered the lowest caste in Indian society. When he left school for the day, the boys were waiting outside, and flogged him. "I don't know why they did it," he says. "All I know is the upper caste likes to torture us. I wanted to give up school somehow I didn't."

Now 22, Chand divides his time between classes in college, working and teaching English and maths to the Dalit children of his village. He is a volunteer for Bhim Pathshala, a network of free after-school coaching classes for Dalit children run by Bhim Army, an organisation that works for the education and rights of Dalits.

Every day, Chand teaches about 20 children between the ages of four and 15 in the courtyard of a temple in Sona village, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, an area that was in the news last year for

violent caste riots.

When he signed up to be a teacher for Bhim Pathshala two years ago, Chand had to read up on Dalit icons and the history of oppression of his people. The temple where the after-school classes are held is dedicated to Guru Ravidass, a 14th-century poet and saint revered by Dalits; when Chand arrives, the children call out "Jai Bhim", a greeting used by Ambedkarites, followers of Dalit icon and social reformer Bhimrao Ambedkar.

He asks the older children about Jyotirao Phule, the 19th-century anti-caste social reformer and Deepak 12, replies with easy confidence, "He fought against the caste system."

"I'm doing this for my community. We have to help each other and knowledge is our only weapon," says Chand's friend Siddharth Rajesh Kumar, a college student who also teaches on the project.

Bhim Army, which has emerged as a dominant voice in Dalit politics, burst upon the scene in 2015 in Saharanpur in western Uttar Pradesh.

The rise of Bhim Army has coincided with the ascent

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A class at Bhim Pathshala in Sona village near Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

of a new, aggressive form of Dalit politics in India steered by young and dynamic leaders. Bhim Army is led by Chandrashekhar Azad, a young, charismatic Dalit man who achieved notoriety when he put up a signboard outside his village that said "The Great Chamar" - Chamar is

used as a pejorative term for "untouchables" - incensing members of the upper caste.

In the last two years, there have been increasing instances of large nationwide protests staged by Dalits. At the same time, cases of violence against the community have increased.

As Bhim Army has grabbed national headlines, its education project for children, which involves an estimated 400 *pathshalas* (schools) running after-school classes across Uttar Pradesh, has been steadily working to bring change.

Local community members contribute to the costs of running the after-school classes and the children are provided with stationery and textbooks.

"They were set up to support Dalit children, most of whom cannot access good education and come from families where parents are illiterate and cannot afford private tuition," says Vinay Ratan Singh, president of Bhim Army.

Bhim Army admits that it is inspired by the right-wing nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which trains its cadre from a young age



A group of children at Bhim Pathshala in Sona village near Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

"They were set up to support Dalit children, most of whom cannot access good education and come from families where parents are illiterate and cannot afford private tuition," says Vinay Ratan Singh, president of Bhim Army. The pathshalas also tap into the need for mentoring that Dalit children rarely find. Discrimination begins in the classroom, with studies showing Dalit children are segregated and excluded, forcing them to drop out of school.

through a network of schools. Bhim Army hopes the students in these classes will go on to become leaders in their communities and change the situation for Dalits.

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classroom, with studies showing Dalit children are segregated and excluded, forcing them to drop out of school.

"The very idea of going to the countryside and telling Dalit families to focus on educating their children is revolutionary," says Chandra Bhan Prasad, a Dalit writer and entrepreneur who created a temple to the "Dalit Goddess of English", to inspire his community to use education as a form of resistance.

Lalita lives in Sona village. Her daughter Ritika never misses a class in the pathshala and since starting there is doing better in her normal school classes as well. Ritika says that while she feels scared of asking questions to the teachers in school, it is easier to ask Chand, whom she calls *bhaiya* (older brother).

"We are labourers, but we want her to study and have a different life," says Lalita.

This article is part of a series on possible solutions to some of the world's most stubborn problems. What else should we cover?

Source: Guardian

Bangladesh Rohingya Refugee Crisis Joint Response Plan March - December 2018



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Since 25 August 2017, 688 000 Rohingya refugees escaping violence and persecution in Myanmar have settled in camps, settlements and within host communities in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, bringing the total number of refugees in the area to more than 900 300.

Objectives

FAO is working with partners in the Food Security Sector to:

- Ensure and sustain timely provision of life-saving and life-sustaining assistance for Rohingya refugees and host communities.
- Promote, enhance and strengthen livelihoods and self-reliance opportunities of local host communities and Rohingya refugees through social and economic empowerment, including strengthening of community-based infrastructures such as markets.

Activities



Mitigate environmental impacts and reduce disaster risk

Community-based disaster risk reduction | climate change adaptation and mitigation | natural resource Conservation and management (incorporation of energy-saving and green interventions) | water management | safe access to alternative cooking fuel



Support livelihoods and markets

farmer field schools | market development | cash for work | small-scale livestock rearing and production | training and market linkages for farmer and fisher groups | training in post-harvest food processing and valueadded production | food, grain and seed safe storage facilities | agricultural production support | microgardening kits



Strengthen food security coordination

chairing technical working groups in energy and environment, livelihoods and food security needs assessments | capacity development plans with government partners

Impact on food security

New Rohingya arrivals - mostly women and children - since August 2017 have joined refugees escaping previous waves of violence, quadrupling the population in highly impoverished Cox's Bazar and surrounds. This places a strain on host communities' limited resources, infrastructure and services. Some 1.2 million people need food security and livelihoods assistance.

Host communities - among the poorest in Bangladesh and now the minority in the region - have experienced dramatic inflation, a highly competitive labour market

New Rohingya arrivals - mostly women and children - since August 2017 have joined refugees escaping previous waves of violence, quadrupling the population in highly impoverished Cox's Bazar and surrounds. This places a strain on host communities' limited resources, infrastructure and services. Some 1.2 million people need food security and livelihoods assistance.



to assist
485,000 people



FAO requires
USD 22.4 million



period
March - December 2018

Situation analysis



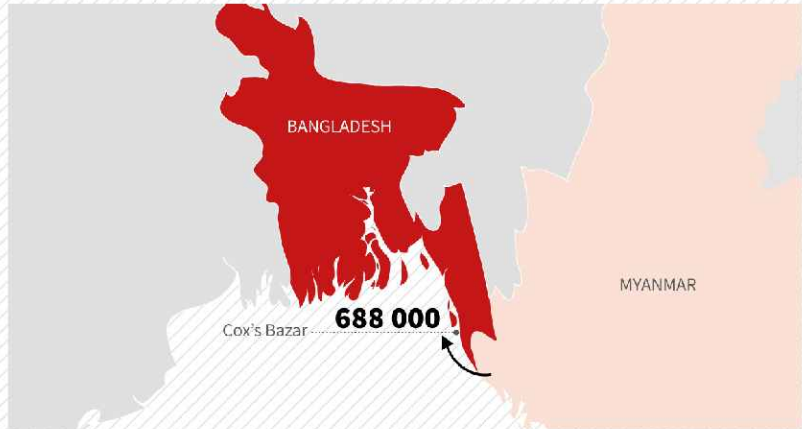
1.2 million people
in need of food security
and livelihoods assistance



900 300 refugees
in Cox's Bazar



57% of host community
population are food
insecure



Source: Inter Sector Coordination Group, Situation Update: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, 21 Jan. 2018

with drastically lower wages, loss of the natural resource base and severe challenges in accessing sufficient food, with 57 percent of the population food insecure. Approximately 30-35 percent of the population in Cox's Bazar are severely food insecure, with 38 percent of children underweight.

The food security situation for refugees in makeshift settlements is highly vulnerable, with up to 90 percent of new arrivals eating just one meal a day. Chronically food-insecure households are affected by high dependency on inadequately diversified diets and a lack of access to cooking fuel.

The ecologically fragile area is on the brink of an

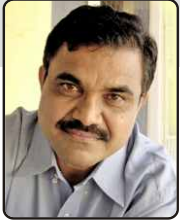
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environmental disaster. Cutting down trees for cooking fuel and the installation of shallow wells damages the ecosystem. Up to 86 percent of the newly installed wells are contaminated with E. coli. As a result of extreme deforestation, the threat of landslides and flash floods has increased. The onset of the summer monsoon in May with sustained heavy rainfall is likely to cause extensive landslip on the denuded slopes.

In 2018, an immediate and comprehensive scale-up in support is required to save lives, protect livelihoods and build resilience, with urgent needs in food security for both refugees and host communities.

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations





The New Normal in Modi's 'New India'



By: Anand Teltumbde

The unyielding spate of mob lynchings in India, and the support they receive from some Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) functionaries and ministers, have shocked the nation. However, completely mindless of the same, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted in characteristic hyperbole on 16 July 2018:

Where the power of hope prevails over mindless hate.
Where 125 crore Indians write their own destiny.
This is our New India. (PMO India 2018)

A day later, on 17 July, this new India, marked by a new normal was berated by the Supreme Court, the custodian of our Constitution. While delivering a judgment on a set of petitions against mob lynchings, the three-member bench of the Supreme Court headed by the chief justice observed that “horrendous acts of mobocracy cannot be permitted to inundate the law of the land,” adding that the recurring pattern of violence “cannot be allowed to become the new normal” (Gowen 2018). Barely four days later, on the night of 20 July 2018, a mob of *gau rakshaks* (cow vigilantes) attacked a poor Muslim man, Rakbar Khan, of Kolgaon village in Mewat district of Haryana bordering Rajasthan. Modi’s “new India” is proving a scary spectre for the large majority of people, particularly Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims, who are unsure of surviving the next day, given the right wingbacked killing squads of cow vigilantes, lynch mobs, patriotic hoodlums, *dharmarakshaks* (religious zealots), and not to undermine the police who operate lawlessly with complete impunity.

The Rakbars in Lynchdom

Alwar city in Rajasthan has recorded its second lynch-mob killing with Rakbar Khan; the first being Pehlu Khan, who was brutally killed by a mob of *gau rakshaks* on 1 April 2017 in similar circumstances, except that he was killed on a highway by dragging him from the vehicle that carried his milch cows in broad daylight (Saini and Mukherjee 2017). Despite showing the documents to prove that the cows were for dairy farming, his family occupation, Khan and others were dragged out of their vehicles and brutally assaulted with rods and sticks. Pehlu later died of his injuries, whilst others, though seriously injured, survived. The perpetrators reportedly robbed the victims of their cell phones, wallets and cash worth ₹1,10,000. As a matter of fact, the BJP’s cow ban has come handy to criminal gangs, masquerading as *gau rakshaks*, to extort money with impunity.

What is worse is the dealing of the state in these open-and-shut crimes. Within a year, the six men Pehlu Khan named as his attackers before he died have all been absolved of any guilt by the police (Mander 2018). The “dying declaration” of Pehlu, as per innumerable court rulings, is sufficient evidence to convict those named. But in the “new India,” Muslims and Dalits are not humans! A similar dying declaration by Sanjay Khobragade of Kawalewada village in Gondia district of Maharashtra was discarded to acquit the accused, and instead his wife and neighbour were arrested (Shantha 2014). The three men the police arrested for Pehlu’s killing are out on bail. Instead, charge sheets have been filed under Section 5 of the Rajasthan Bovine Animal (Prohibition of Slaughter and Regulation of Temporary Migration or Export) Act, 1995 against the two young men-Azmat and Rafeeq-who were attacked along with Pehlu but survived their injuries. Forget justice, the new normal is to shelter the culprits and charge the victims, as it happened in the recent Bhima Koregaon case wherein the agent provocateurs of violence, Sambhaji Bhide and Milind Ekbote, are out on bail, and those who demanded justice for the victims have been booked as “urban Maoists” under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

The Pehlus and Rakbars of this country are *meant* to be killed in the new India. *IndiaSpend* created a database of mob lynchings through the content analysis of English media over an eight-year period (2010-18) and found that of the total 87 lynching cases since 2010, 97% took place after Modi’s government came to power in May 2014, and of the 289 victims, 88% were Muslims (Abraham and Rao 2017). Majority of the cases of cow-related violence took place in the BJP-ruled states, and Muslims comprised 84% of the total killed. It may not be far-fetched to guess that the rest 16% would comprise Dalits, who are not the intended “other” in the BJP’s schema but are the natural victims of the glorification of India’s past. However, as it appears of late, the realisation that Dalits are unlikely to be impressed by Hindutva prospects could be channelised to further consolidate Hindu solidarity, that sees Dalit assertion as an affront. Incidentally, as the facts surfaced, while Rakbar was left seriously wounded by the lynch mob, it was the police that completed the task of torturing him to death, signalling a partnership between the police and Hindutva mobs and heralding another kind of new normal.

The New Normal

In every sphere of public life, a “new normal” has been

established in the last four years. Politics in India was never really principled but neither had it stooped to such lows, as we experience today. That lies, doublespeak and falsehoods are integral to politicians was always known but rarely were these peddled, in keeping with Gobbles' maxim, as blatantly as they are today. The "new normal" involves fudging figures, propagandizing half-truths, and repeating hyperbolic claims in the face of contrary evidence. The BJP has claimed, as they did with Pehlu, that Rakbar was a cow smuggler. However, the family's traditional vocation of dairy farming and dire poverty prove a stark contradiction to this claim. Realising the consequence of this incident in an election year, the BJP's state-level leaders tried to shift the entire blame for Rakbar's death onto the police, bailing the arrested gau rakshaks and seeking to contain the damage to their Hindu vote bank.

Further, intellectualism too was never associated with Indian politicians, but never before have there been such blatant attempts to de-intellectualise the country as now. Identities like caste, community, religion, language, etc, were always exploited by political parties of all hues but never before has any party used the Hindu identity with such ideological zeal as the BJP, pushing India on a fast backward. The "new normal" consists of *sadhus/sadhvis* as politicians, *yogis/ yoginis* as ministers, and gangsters as civil society activists.

The politician-police nexus has been infamous but rarely before has it been misused to the present extent. It is not the police alone, but all institutions that are being mutated to carry its ideological writ. Contrary to the folklore, India has never truly or even constitutionally been secular. The hegemony of custom, tradition and culture of the majority community was always discernible but subdued. This has now exacerbated with new vigour. The mythification of history has been inherent to India, but never before have myths themselves been projected/valorised as history, as it now is. The supremacist belief that India was the originator of all ideas, philosophies and knowledge in the world, which others have just stolen, is a new normal. Though caste still functioned as the lifeworld of people, they were not openly justified as they are today. The new normal is to speak of the virtues of caste, display caste markers, practise caste customs and impose them on others, if necessary, by force. The marginalisation of rights, curbing of dissent, censure of questioning, imposition of Hindu cultural mores, etc, is the new normal, and so is the inflicting of anti-people policies at the behest of imperialist forces in the name of patriotism, nationalism, and development. Curbing the democratic expression of workers, Dalits, Adivasis, students, women, and children with surveillance and police terror is also a new normal.

New Law or Renewed Will?

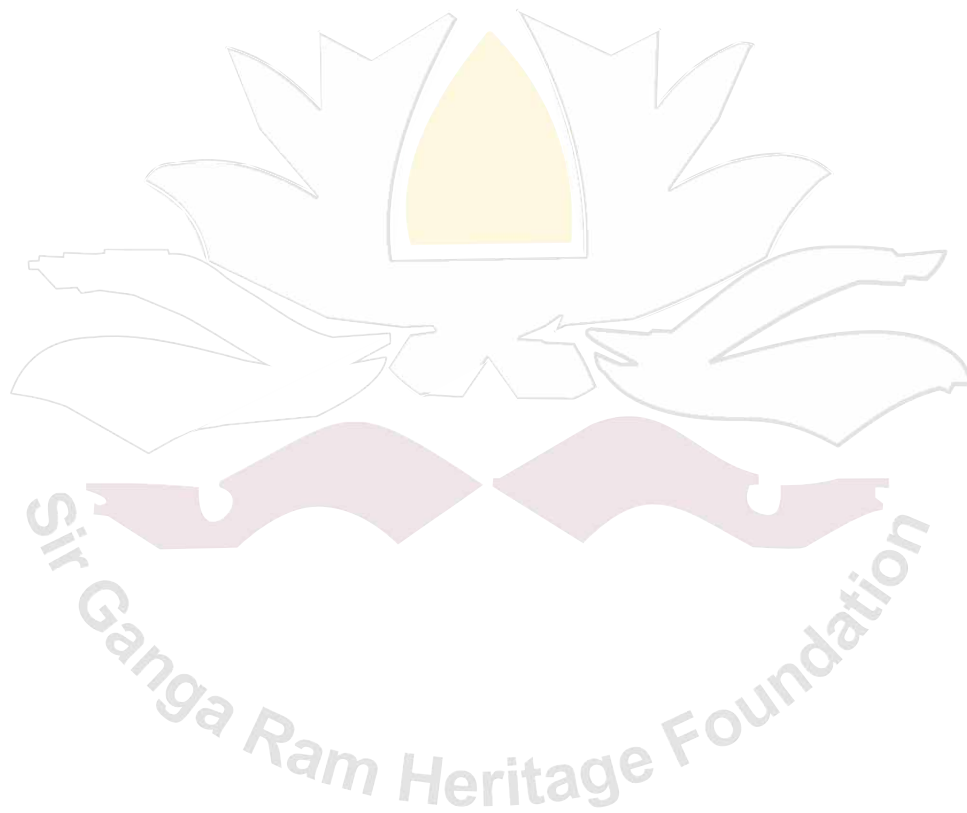
Reacting to the increasing mob lynchings, the apex court

indignantly asked the states to legislate a new law to deal with the menace. The question really is: Are there no laws to deal with murders, or attempted murders, or causing grievous injury, or spreading communal strife, or committing caste atrocity? The issue has never really been the absence of law but the absence of will to implement it. It is possible that the existing laws have lacunae but before these are exposed, how can there be a clamour for a new law? Given that the root cause of this menace is clearly located in political support and police complicity, it may amount to diversionary tactics as is already revealed by the objections of certain BJP lawyers suggesting that the courts do not have a *locus standi* to ask the legislatures what to do.

If at all, the new law would need to chastise the entire law and order machinery, including judiciary, with well-defined accountability. In the case of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, there are punitive provisions against public servants who wilfully commit dereliction of duty in implementing the act. Yet, most cases of atrocities fail because the police, at the behest of the local elite, deliberately weaken the case during their investigation and prosecution. At times, they have been known to violate the rules that enable the obliging courts to dismiss such cases, which are then construed as "misuse of the act" as observed by the Supreme Court recently, compounding the injustice against victims. But there is not an iota of action ever taken against the erring public servant. Why should the judiciary then be immune to these provisions, if they are found to act in a prejudicial manner? When Judge C S Karnan can be sent to jail for daring to speak against judicial bungling, why are the judges who display infirmity of mind not taken to task?

When institutions are wilfully destroyed by the very people who are supposed to preserve and nourish them, it paves the way for dictatorial regimes. The present government has systematically destroyed all democratic institutions by installing people of questionable competence at key positions, who meekly carry out its writ. Nowhere is this as evident as in the sphere of education and in the saga of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), being transformed from an internationally respected democratic space into its antithesis by its vice chancellor and his coterie. The recent action of the administration disallowing Umar Khalid, who was arrested along with Kanhaiya Kumar and Anirban Bhattacharya for shouting anti-India slogans on the basis of doctored videos, from submitting his doctoral thesis in clear defiance of the Delhi High Court's directions illustrates the bizarre behaviour of this once hallowed institution in Modi's new India (Shankar 2018).

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