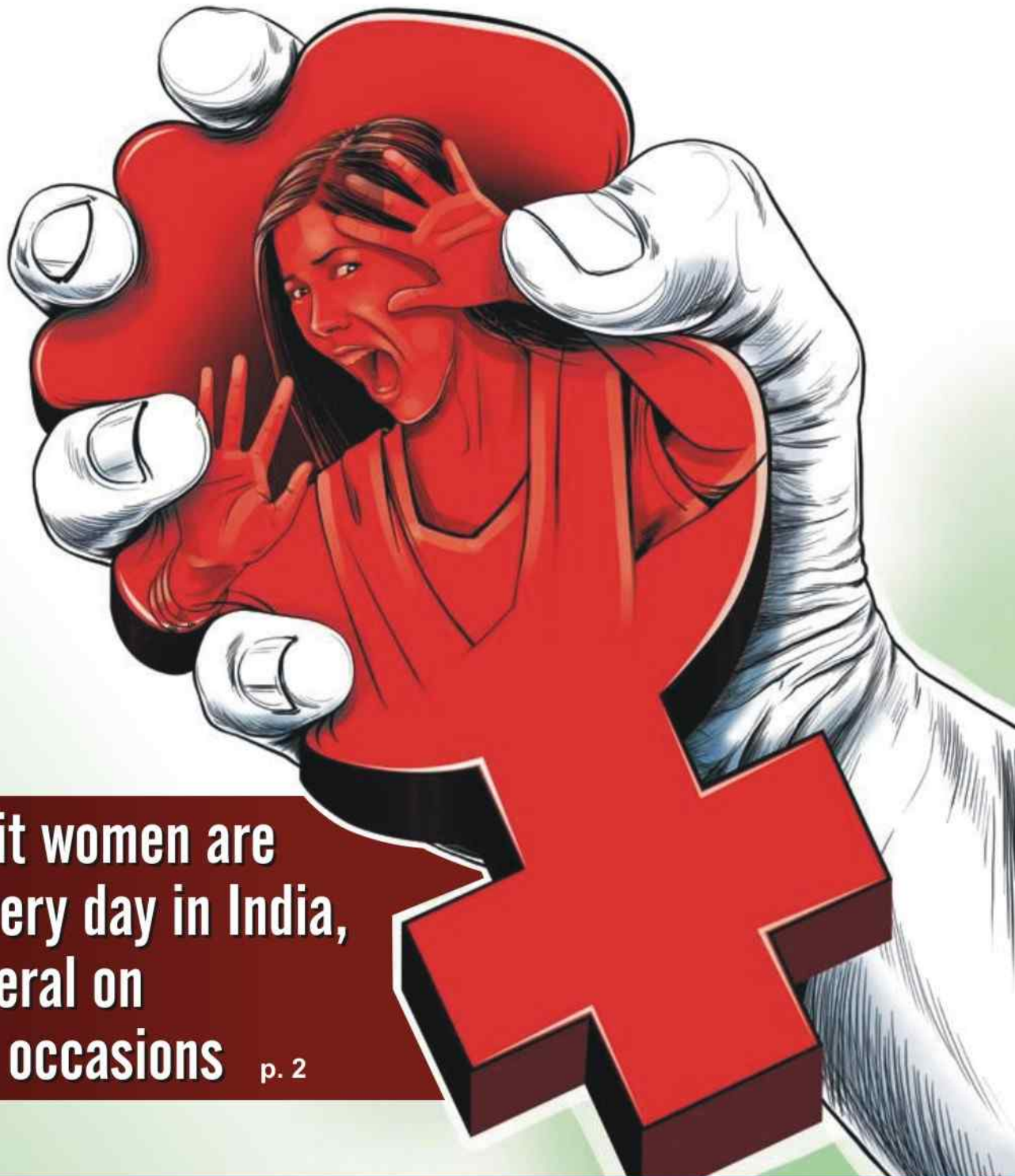


# Quarterly MINO-VIEW

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Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies



**Four Dalit women are  
raped every day in India,  
with several on  
multiple occasions** p. 2



**Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation** [www.sgrhf.org.pk](http://www.sgrhf.org.pk)

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## Editorial

Caste dynamic is behind sexual violence in India. The combination of caste and discrimination makes the Dalit women vulnerable to discrimination, violence and rape. Statistics confirms that Dalit women are at the bottom of the bottom and are continuously targeted because they are seen as the weakest of the weak. In India if you are a woman, poor and Dalit then there is no position worse than that. NCRA Data suggests that more than four women are being raped every day. 23% of Dalit women are being raped and this sexual crime is committed with a sense of impunity. Women are vulnerable because of low conviction rates and lack of legal protection of victims. Crime against Dalit women are not properly registered or investigated, not only conviction rates are low but there is a large backlog of cases. Police also collude with perpetrators from dominant upper caste in covering crime. These rampant incidents of rape highlights the link between sexual violence and the destructive caste system in India Sexual violence is a growing problem in India due to caste and gender based inequality. Rape is used as a tool to maintain power. The severe discrimination for being both a Dalit and a woman make them a key target of sexual violence and systematically denies them choices and freedom in every sphere of life. In recent days horrifying rape cases in India have sparked outrage and large scale protests nationwide. However its heartening to see the resistance shown by Dalits against this heinous crime of rape and also the resolution shown by many survivors and victims' to seek justice.

Editor

# Discussion Program on 'Increasing Violence Against Dalit Girls & Women and Access to Justice in Nepal'

Coinciding the occasion of 109th International Women's Day, Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) organized a discussion program on 'Increasing Violence Against Dalit Girls and Women and Their Access to Justice' on 11 March.

On the program, a situational analysis of violence against Dalit girls and women, especially rape, based on the study carried out by FEDO, was presented. According to the study, girls and the women from the Dalit community are more prone to the violence especially rape when compared to the girls and the women of the other castes. In addition to this, they have lesser access to justice. The study found that off the total incidents of rape, 21% of the victims were from the Dalit community. Unfortunately, only 15% of them could get justice. Likewise, there were 729 incidents of rape in Nepal from the month of Baishakh (April-May) to the Magh (Jan-Feb) this year. Off which in 154 incidents, victims were from the Dalit community. Moreover, in 80% of the cases, the victim has been killed.

The study shows that due to poor and lesser access to education, high proportion of poverty, poor presence in state mechanism, no equality in justice, poor financial status, discrimination from so-called high caste people, Dalit find it difficult to seek justice. Owing to this, even police do not register their complaint. The society and even the police emphasize to solve the case by offering some financial benefits to the victims instead of going through the legal proceedings and provide the justice to the victim as per the law.

The study suggests proper rehabilitation of the victim and establishment of the strong mechanism for easing the access to justice. Likewise, it also recommended the amendment of the existing law in a manner to remove legal loopholes that silence the violence on many occasions.

The findings of the study were shared among the Dalit women rights activists, human rights activists, women rights activists, local level representatives,

lawyers, media officials and researchers working on Dalit issues.

The program was chaired by the President of FEDO Kala Swarnakar while the major guests presented in the program were: Senior Advocate Meera Dhungana, Deputy Inspector General Haribhakta Prajapati and Parliamentarian Anjana Bishankhe.

*Source: Feminist Dalit Organization  
For a Just and Equitable Society*



# Four Dalit women are raped every day in India, with several on multiple occasions

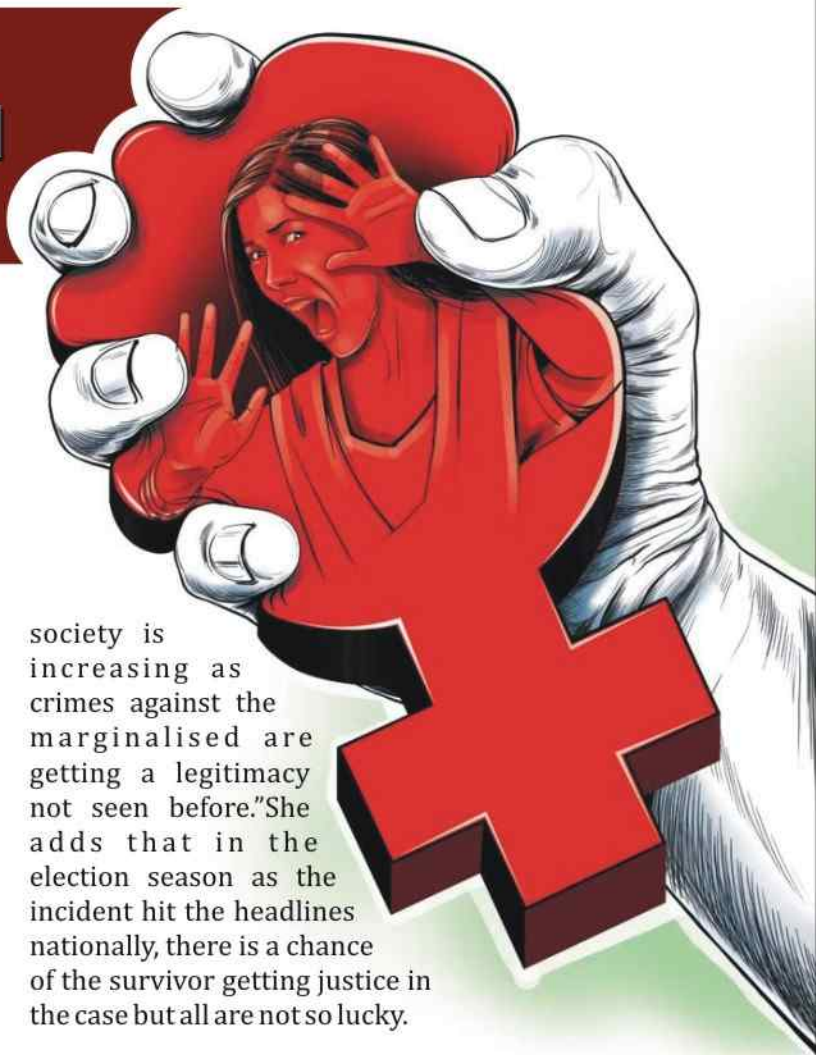
Bhojlal, a septuagenarian and a Dalit near Thanagazi, is visibly traumatised at the gang rape of a young woman from the same community he belongs to-Balai. Every day since last week, he makes a round to the Thanagazi police station-not far from his house-to check on the development in the case.

He recalls how some decades back it was almost a way of life for "dabang" (strong) men of the villages in the area to abduct young girls belonging to low castes whenever they pleased. "They would keep them for days and rape them till they wanted. When the girls would return, her family would take solace that at least she had returned alive," he says. "Not much has changed. Dalit women continue to be targeted because they are seen as the weakest of the weak."

Statistics confirm what Bhojlal believes. Dalit women indeed are at the bottom of the bottom. Of all crimes committed against the members of the Scheduled Castes, the highest are against Dalit women-the 2016 National Crime Records Bureau, the last data released nationally, show. Assaults on SC women to outrage her modesty, rapes, attempts to commit rapes and insults to the modesty of SC women consist of lion's share of all cases against Dalits.

"And this is just tip of the iceberg because most of the crimes against dalit women are never even reported," says Ranjana Kumari of the Centre for Social Studies. "If you are woman in India and poor and a Dalit-then there is no position worse than that."The NCRB data also suggests that more than four Dalit women are raped every day. The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, an NGO, says over 23% of Dalit women report being raped and many have reported multiple instances of rape. Many perpetrators commit sexual crimes with a sense of impunity, said Mariam Dhawale, general secretary of the All India Democratic Women's Association, pointing to abysmally low conviction rates and a lack of legal protection for the victims.

"And it's particularly troubling that the sense of authority among the self-appointed gangs in the



society is increasing as crimes against the marginalised are getting a legitimacy not seen before."She adds that in the election season as the incident hit the headlines nationally, there is a chance of the survivor getting justice in the case but all are not so lucky.

Indu Agnihotri of the Centre for Women Development Studies, however, has a problem with the politicisation of the Alwar gang rape. "This kind of political attention often leads to community mobilisation that helps political parties electorally but I am not sure it will ensure speedy justice in the case." Agnihotri, however, is also happy at the resistance shown by Dalits in heinous crimes of late.

"It's heartening to see the resolution shown by many survivors or victims to seek justice."

## **Dalit women are the weakest of the weak**

Dalit women are at the bottom of the bottom. Of all crimes committed against the members of the Scheduled Castes, the highest are against Dalit women.

Assaults on SC women to outrage her modesty, rapes, attempts to commit rapes and insults to modesty of SC women consist of lion's share of all cases.

*Source: New Indian Express*

# US research: 40% of India's casteist Facebook posts are anti-reservation, anti-Dalit



A recent American civil society research has found that 40% of India's casteist posts on Facebook (FB) have anti-reservation slant. Asserting that the reservation policy in India is similar to affirmative action in the United States, the research study, titled "Facebook India: Towards The Tipping Point of Violence Caste and Religious Hate Speech", says, this type of hate content on FB is mainly directed against Dalits and Adivasis.

Pointing out that the rhetoric of anti-reservationism is not the only of form of casteism found on FB, the study, carried out by Equality Labs, a South Asian American human rights and technology start-up, says, "Additional casteist posts included caste-based slurs, derogatory references to caste-based occupations such as manual scavenging, anti-Ambedkar posts (such as photoshopping Ambedkar's face onto memes as an echo of real-world vandalism) and anti-inter-caste love unions posts."

While casteist posts are found to be 13% of all FB posts having hate content relating to India -- as against 37% Islamophobic, 16% false news, 13% sexist, 11% relating to violence and 9% anti-religious minorities -- the study believes, "Casteist posts are an area of serious concern" because caste discrimination is part of the Indian "ecosystem of violence designed to shame, intimidate, and keep caste oppressed communities from asserting their rights and participating as equals in society."

## Hate content in India's FB posts

Giving specific examples of casteist posts, the study cites an FB group called Anti-Chamaar Group, Pointing out, "Chamaar is a Dalit caste found throughout North India who work with leather". It says, the group -- which came into existence in 2016

and remains intact despite numerous attempts to report "explicitly" against continuing to post and content.

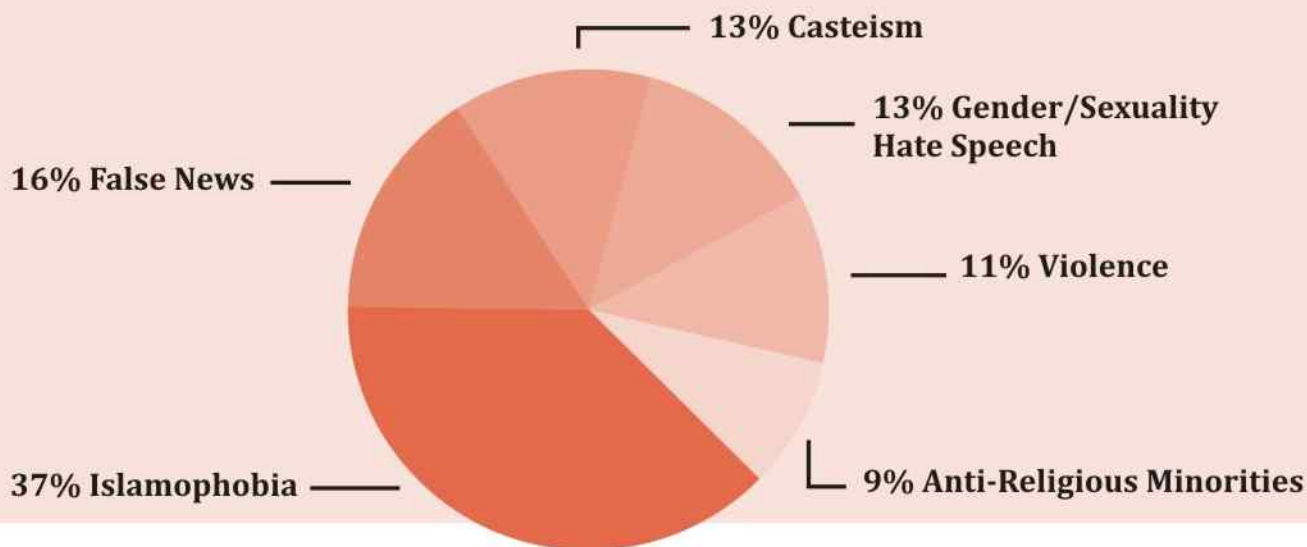
atte about it to FB -- is this caste, derogatory images

Suggesting that the anti-caste content is particularly objectionable because FB has included "caste" when describing protected classes in hate speech, the study regrets, "FB fails in implementing protections for these classes on their platform in the Indian market", blaming it on FB's Indian staff, which, it says, "lacks the cultural competency needed to recognize, respect and serve caste, religious, gender and queer minorities".

Giving more examples of anti-caste posts, the study cites one where a photoshopped image of Dr BR Ambedkar, "a Dalit anti-caste liberation leader whose stature is similar to that of Dr Martin Luther King Jr in America. Its caption reads, "When you clean all the toilets and then fuck up the education system with reservation."

The study states, "To understand why this post is so deeply offensive, one must understand the work conditions of Dalits. These castes have historically been forced into forms of slavery requiring them to do the filthiest jobs, like handling dead bodies and cleaning toilets. Even in modern-day India, this includes the practice of manual scavenging, where Dalit workers clean out the sewage from sewers with their bare hands and bodies."

Asserting that "thousands of Dalits die every year as a result of inhaling sewer gases or by simply drowning in sewage", and calling it a "dreadful exploitation", the study says, despite this, "A caste-



oppressed people is made the brunt of jokes." It adds, "The social context is also important here. Statues of Dr Ambedkar are regularly vandalized in India to intimidate and shame caste oppressed communities."

In yet another example, the study cites two anti-reservationist posts, noting, they make "a derogatory reference to the caste-based occupation of cleaning sewage", implying that "Dalits are good for only jobs involving sewers and not fit to compete with 'savarnas' (upper caste people) for jobs with dignity." The posts have appeared on a page made by an FB group that calls for the need to make Manusmriti as India's Constitution.

The study finds yet another post taking a similar line, pointing out, it is particularly "distressing", because, even as rejecting Manusmriti, it talks of "fucking" the Constitution, underlining, the position it takes is to assert that "Hindu scripture is above the Constitution of India - and not just any scripture, but [Manusmriti] that enforces caste oppression and violence."

Then, the study gives the example of a post with "another meme of Dr Ambedkar", showing shows him "jumping of a bridge with the epithet 'bhangi', making a pun on 'bungee jumping'." It adds, "Terms like 'bhangi' are extremely derogatory in India... While bhangi is the name of a caste that does manual scavenging, or the cleaning of sewers, it is used as a slur in upper caste communities."

Then, says the study, a post provides "a deeply offensive manipulated image" in which "the face of

Dalit leader Mayawati has been photoshopped onto the body of a Miss India beauty pageant winner. The caption below references Indian affirmative action policies saying that in 2030 there will be reservation (affirmative action) for beauty pageants for Dalits and Adivasis."

Comments the study, "Beyond the repetition and disregard of affirmative action, this image is meant to further mock and demean Mayawati with the underlying insinuation that she is unattractive. The idea is to trivialize Dalit people, and Dalit women in particular, who are often stereotyped as dark, ugly, like demons, witches, unattractive and so on."



The study regrets, over and above all this, "there is widespread doxxing occurring on the FB platform, threatening activists, journalists and others who speak on behalf of the vulnerable, adding, "93% of all hate speech posts reported to FB remain on FB. This includes content advocating violence, bullying and use of offensive slurs, reflecting a near total failure of the content moderation process."

Source: Counter View

# Pakistan opens heritage temple for Worship

**Yudhvir. Rana**

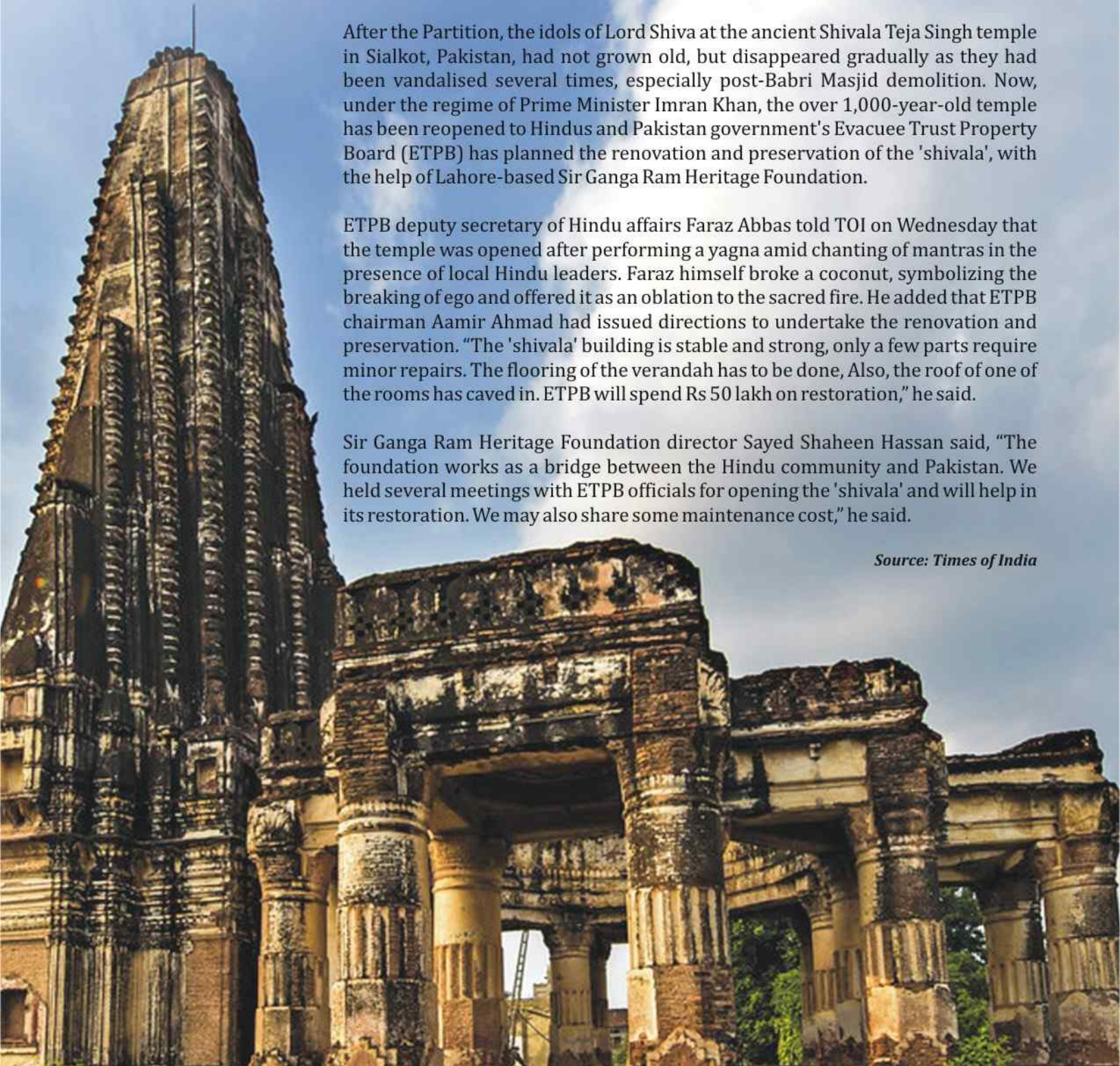
In 1905, poet Allama Iqbal wrote in his poem 'Naya Shivala' - "*sach keh doon ae brahman, gar tu bura na maney, tere sanam kadon ke butt ho gaye purane* (I tell you truth oh Brahmin, if I you don't mind these idols in your temples have grown old)".

After the Partition, the idols of Lord Shiva at the ancient Shivala Teja Singh temple in Sialkot, Pakistan, had not grown old, but disappeared gradually as they had been vandalised several times, especially post-Babri Masjid demolition. Now, under the regime of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the over 1,000-year-old temple has been reopened to Hindus and Pakistan government's Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) has planned the renovation and preservation of the 'shivala', with the help of Lahore-based Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation.

ETPB deputy secretary of Hindu affairs Faraz Abbas told TOI on Wednesday that the temple was opened after performing a yagna amid chanting of mantras in the presence of local Hindu leaders. Faraz himself broke a coconut, symbolizing the breaking of ego and offered it as an oblation to the sacred fire. He added that ETPB chairman Aamir Ahmad had issued directions to undertake the renovation and preservation. "The 'shivala' building is stable and strong, only a few parts require minor repairs. The flooring of the verandah has to be done, Also, the roof of one of the rooms has caved in. ETPB will spend Rs 50 lakh on restoration," he said.

Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation director Sayed Shaheen Hassan said, "The foundation works as a bridge between the Hindu community and Pakistan. We held several meetings with ETPB officials for opening the 'shivala' and will help in its restoration. We may also share some maintenance cost," he said.

*Source: Times of India*





# India's honor killings dishonor women

More than 300 honor killings have been reported in India in three years.



Ratna Devi, who lives in a shanty home alongside the Yamuna River in New Delhi, remembers vividly how she and her husband were

brutally assaulted by her family because she had married a socially poor Dalit man.

The 33-year-old woman fell in love with the Dalit man in her home state of Haryana and married him discreetly because she knew her family would prevent her from doing so.

"For high-caste families, it is not only a crime but also a sin to marry someone of lower caste in India. I committed that sin and faced my family's wrath," Devi told ucanews.com.

The family attacked Devi and her husband with wooden sticks to save their honor. Only the timely intervention of police saved the couple from death.

They later moved to New Delhi. "Life is good here. We have children and my husband has a decent job with a private firm," Devi said.

However, not all who marry outside their caste are so lucky. Families continue to carry out honor killings of relatives in India.

In the last three years, more than 300 cases have been reported, according to government statistics. The practice has its roots in the caste system followed in Hinduism, the religion of 80 percent of Indian people.

The caste system considers those outside the four castes - priests, warriors, traders and farmers - to be outcasts. They are socially excluded because even their presence is considered polluting.

The socially and economically poor are considered untouchable because of their menial work such as

clearing night soil (human excrement) and removing dead animals.

Although a law banned untouchability and caste discrimination in 1955, the practice continues in several forms such as non-acceptance of marriage.

As recently as May 1, a 19-year-old pregnant woman and her husband were set ablaze in Maharashtra by their relatives. The woman died three days later in a hospital while her husband is fighting for his life in hospital.

Media reported that Mangesh Ransingh, a construction worker and Rukmini Ransingh had married in November last year against the wishes of the girl's parents. The girl's father is one of the accused in the case. Two of her uncles have been arrested.

Mangesh belongs to the Lohar community, classified as a nomadic tribe, while Rukmini belonged to a scheduled caste called Pashi.

A 21-year-old Dalit man was beaten to death by upper-caste men in Uttarakhand on April 26 for eating his dinner near them at a wedding.

In another suspected honor killing, a 24-year-old woman was allegedly killed by her parents on April 23 in Maharashtra for marrying against their wishes. Police arrested both her parents on the





complaint of her husband.

In March 2018, India's Supreme Court ruled that honor-based violence is not only a matter of criminal law but also contrary to adults' fundamental right to exercise choice as guaranteed in the constitution.

#### Attacked for basic freedoms

Social researchers say the rigidity of the caste system is the main reason for honor killings.

Honor killings are "a frightened reaction to rapid social change in India. The inability of formal governance to reach rural areas also forms the root cause of this evil," says a report by V. Jeyasanthi, S. Mayeleswari and R. Abirami from VHNSN College in Tamil Nadu.

People, especially women, are attacked for such basic freedoms as personal career choices, education, style of dress, choice of friends and even the number of children they wish to have, the report said.

Puneet Kaur Grewal, a senior research fellow at Punjab University, said India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and has also ratified the convention.

As a state party to the convention, India is obliged to make laws and punish individuals for ill-informed ideas of honor that essentially institutionalize discrimination, Grewal said.

Abid Simnani, a sociologist based in Kashmir, said the roots of the caste system are so deeply ingrained in India's social psyche that education is needed to

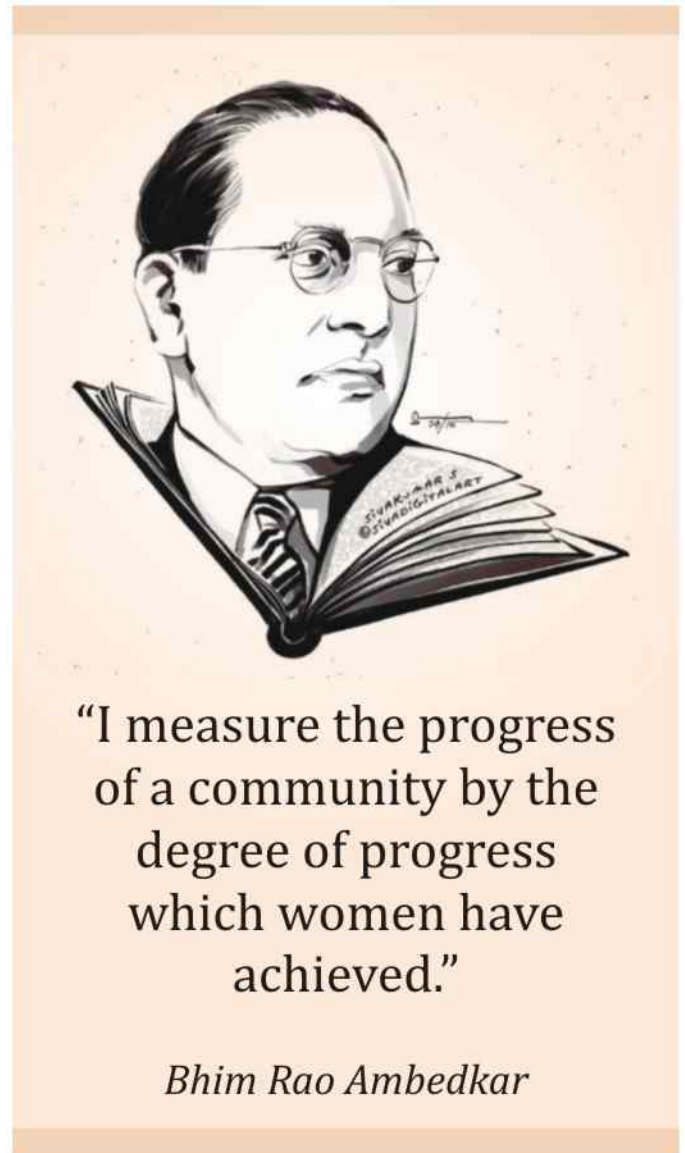
get rid of it.

"So deep are the roots of the caste system that not only are marriages disallowed and couples murdered, the upper castes consider eating with lower castes a sin," he added.

Seied Benjamin Hosseini, a sociologist from Aligarh Muslim University, said the violence will only be reduced when this patriarchal mindset is challenged.

In a social change brought by awareness creation and stringent laws, women should become economically free and capable of taking their own decisions without the age-old evil of honor killings, he said.

*Source: International La Croix*



# Casteism in Gujarat: Dalits across hundreds of villages can't get a haircut due to years of oppression



Getting a haircut is a routine affair for most men, but it's not so for lakhs of Dalit men in hundreds of villages in Gujarat. Since before Independence, Dalit men have been denied a haircut by barbers in villages of Gujarat. Even though this fact is well-known to authorities and social activists, it has remained unchanged despite the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989.

This practice is so common that it's not even being raised as a discriminatory practice by the Dalits themselves. It was only in mid-2018 that some Dalit youths from Trent village in Mandal block of Ahmedabad district decided to complain to the block panchayat about this form of discrimination. But despite the authorities asking them, the barbers refused to cut the hair of the Dalit youth. In fact, they preferred to close shop instead of cutting the hair of Dalit youth. Since then, four barber shops of Trent village have been closed by the police and the Dalit men from the village continue to get their hair cut in nearby either Viramgam or Mandal, both nearby towns.

A massive study done by Navsarjan Trust of 1,589 villages of Gujarat about various discriminatory practices against Dalits in 2010 revealed that in 73 percent of the villages surveyed, barbers didn't cut the hair of Dalit men. This means that 1,160 villages had this practice in place since before Independence and no amount of social reform has changed the situation.

If this percentage is extrapolated to all the 18,676 villages of Gujarat, the figure comes to 13,633 villages where this practice continues to exist. That is a huge figure and a shameful statistic for Gujarat,

where Mahatma Gandhi took up several campaigns to end social boycott and discrimination of Dalits and tribals.

Casteism in Gujarat: Dalits across hundreds of villages can't get a haircut due to years of oppression

Dalit youths approach police over the issue of barbers denying them haircuts in Gujarat's Mandal block. Image courtesy: Sonal Kellogg

Instead of going down, the cases of atrocities have been increasing in Gujarat. In the last 15 years, cases of atrocities registered in Gujarat have increased by 70 percent and the conviction rate is dismal at below five percent.

In April and May, there have been several conflicts where Dalit grooms - who had decided to ride mares for their marriage processions - have been opposed by upper caste communities. In several villages, upper castes have boycotted the Dalit community or have also thrashed the grooms. Various other aspirations of Dalit youth have also been opposed by upper caste communities, like riding a bike, putting colourful stickers on their bikes and also sporting stylish haircuts. Many such steps have angered dominant castes who have attacked Dalits on several instances in Gujarat in recent months.

One of the men who was part of the protest at Trent village against the barbers for their refusals to cut Dalit men's hair, Ashok Parmar, 26, said, "The barber shops in our village are still closed. The barbers now are cutting the hair of OBCs and other general castes men either in their homes or in his own house. We are forced to get a haircut in neighbouring towns. We faced massive pressure not just from the other

dominant castes in the village but also from our own parents and elders. They didn't want any trouble."

"You have to understand that most Dalits in our village are very poor and are daily wagers. They can't afford to take up a fight with the dominant castes of the village. We, 20-25 Dalit youths, all educated, decided to take up this fight, but it was not easy. However, we decided not to file an official complaint as we are facing tremendous pressure both from other dominant communities and also from our own community leaders and family members."

Kiritbhai Rathod, working in Navrasjan, an NGO working for Dalit rights which also conducted the study of discrimination in 1,589 Gujarat villages in 2010, said, "The study might be nine years old but the situation in the villages has remained the same. So many forms of discrimination continue to be practised in the villages in Gujarat. Dalits are not able to draw water from same wells, aren't served tea in same vessels in tea stalls, not allowed to sit in chairs in Panchayats, refused entry to religious places or participation in community religious events, etc. There are so many forms of discrimination which continue to be in practice in Gujarat."

About the barber shops which were shut down, Kiritbhai said, "After the Dalit young men of Trent village took up the issue, we tried to reason with the panchayat of the village and also appealed to the Sarpanch but he remained adamant. He said, 'Do what you want but the barbers will not cut the hair of Dalit men.' The state government says that caste-based discrimination doesn't exist in Gujarat. Earlier, state governments undertook programmes to abolish discrimination at village level, taluka level etc but now it isn't happening."

Kiritbhai further said, "Panchayats should organise events where upper castes and Dalits are encouraged to drink tea together, draw water from the same wells and sit together to study. Such programmes were undertaken earlier but now, the state government is in denial." As far as steps to abolish discrimination are concerned, Kiritbhai felt that the onus is on the dominant castes to take steps in their villages. The Dalits who are being discriminated against are not the people who can



end discrimination, it should be done by the Patels, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and other castes, said Kiritbhai.

Jignesh Mevani, a well-known Dalit leader from Gujarat who is also MLA from Vadgam in Gujarat, spoke about the discrimination still existing in the state. He said, "Article 17 of the Indian Constitution has abolished untouchability long back and the practice of it is an offence under Protection of Civil Rights Act. But despite this, untouchability is being practised in more than 1,500 villages of Gujarat and there is not a single case where an offence has been registered. When I raised the issue in the Gujarat Assembly, the entire BJP kept silent. They did not give any assurance to put an end to this casteist practice. This shows not just indifference and callousness on the part of the BJP government but it also shows how openly they stand for so called upper caste people."

It remains to be seen if the situation changes in these villages. It is pertinent to remember that hundreds of men and women have gone abroad to study or have immigrated to the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand and several other western countries from many villages of Gujarat. Thousands of Patels from Gujarati villages live in the USA and other countries. So, it's fair to say that they are aware that caste-based discrimination is against human rights and is definitely something which our society should be ashamed of. Yet this practice continues in Gujarat and the state still claims to be a modern and progressive state in India.

*Source: First post*

# MEP's ask EU to act to end the unjust blocking of IDSN's UN accreditation



*Several high-profile members of the European Parliament have sent a letter to the EU High-Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, asking the EU to take action to support IDSN's 10-year quest for UN accreditation, at the upcoming May meeting of the UN NGO Committee.*

The letter from the MEP's states:

"This continued and deliberate obstruction of the granting of ECOSOC consultative status to IDSN, on no legitimate grounds whatsoever, amounts to exclusion and reprisal against a civil society organization hindering its legitimate work with the UN. Given the EU's stated support for civil society and commitment to address caste discrimination, it is imperative that the EU stands behind organisations such as IDSN and proactively supports their access to multilateral fora."



The signatories to the letter include, Heidi Hautala, Reinhard Butikofer, Ana Gomes, Barbara Lochbihler and David Martin. They write that,

"IDSN is a key actor in bringing the plight of Dalits, suffering from caste discrimination worldwide, to the attention of the UN as well as at the EU level. We

therefore find it unacceptable that the organisation's application has now been unjustly deferred on spurious and repetitive grounds by the UN NGO Committee for over 10 years. Blocking accreditation is a clear attempt to silence the voices of the Dalit community on the international stage."

The MEP's also specifically urge the High Representative, "to instruct the European External Action Service, in coordination with EU member states, to actively support IDSN's accreditation when it is considered once again in May 2019."

IDSN's application for UN consultative status (known as ECOSOC accreditation) has been delayed for over 10 years. The accreditation is needed to participate fully in UN fora including at the UN Human Rights Council. IDSN has documented the process and repetitive questioning, as well as the support to IDSN from high-level UN officials and others. Details of this can be found in the IDSN ECOSOC Factsheet and all the questions posed over the years are documented in the IDSN Detailed ECOSOC note.

"IDSN welcomes the support from the MEPs as we strongly believe that Dalit voices should under no circumstances be blocked from UN for a, and we sincerely hope that the May session of the NGO Committee will finally result in IDSN being granted the long-awaited ECOSOC accreditation," says IDSN Director, Meena Varma.

*Source IDSN*

# Dalit Women in Corporate India are Being Left Behind

While companies are increasingly aware of the need for a 'feminist' narrative within the organisation, the corporate sector as a whole ignores the reality of caste and the effect this has on the workplace.

I am a Dalit woman who grew up in a semi-urban context in southern India to parents who are second generation Christian converts. I'm an English-speaking, university-educated Christian, who currently works in the corporate sector and lives in the city. Apart from my obvious privileges, relative to other women of my community, I am lucky to be working for a multinational company that puts a high emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. As an employee I have access to tonnes of material, online and offline, on what diversity and inclusion mean in everyday corporate life. There is also training, learning sessions, and focal points that are available to help everyone make unbiased decisions, especially if they happen to be in a position of authority. In many ways it almost feels like I cannot falter and neither can my superiors. Almost.

While I do believe frameworks that seek to create inclusive cultures have to be in place, they do not always guarantee the everyday, actual practice of accepting people from marginalised communities in the workplace. In reality, when such almost perfect frameworks are applied in contexts such as India, which is diverse not only in terms of gender, language and religion, but also caste, colour and region, it results in a number of loopholes that can be taken advantage of. My journey, spanning nine years in techno-commercial intelligence and three years in technical research, has thus been a toughening and a liberating experience. In the course of it, I have tried to observe, understand and articulate what it personally means to be a Dalit woman in corporate India.



## Caste is still an issue in corporate India

Generally speaking, there is an extremely minimal presence of Dalit women in corporate spaces, which by itself is a huge challenge. Unlike the public sector, no affirmative action policies in India mandate the recruitment of Dalits or Dalit women in the private sector. A study conducted in 2010 by the Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion in New Delhi found that while economic reforms (that started in 1991) did result in increased employment for educated Dalit women in private companies, it did not necessarily ensure higher wages, security of employment, or better welfare. Only 10% of the women in the sample studied had incomes over Rs 9,000 per month (33% had incomes between Rs 4,500 and 6,500; 30% between Rs 3,000 and 4,500; and 22% less than Rs 3,000). When cross-tabulated with their academic qualification, the study found that there was a severe mismatch 64% of Dalit women graduates and above, including vocational, diploma, or certificate courses, were earning only between Rs 3,000 and 6,500 per month. This is undoubtedly an extreme disparity when compared to their non-Dalit female counterparts.

More recently, a study conducted by Surinder Singh Jodhka, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, showed that 94% of the top jobs in the private sector went to Brahmins and Baniyas. To some extent, Sukhdeo Thorat's and Paul Attewell's 2009 study helps explain why. The professors discovered, through a social experiment, that for every 10 'upper'

caste Hindu applicants who received an interview call, only 6 Dalits and 3 Muslims were similarly called. They concluded that in private companies, applicants with a typical Muslim or a Dalit name had a lower chance of success than their upper caste Hindu counterparts. A study by the Centre for Social Studies in Gujarat also concluded that, based on a sample of the top 1000 companies listed in the Indian stock exchanges for 2010, caste-based diversity was non-existent, and nearly 65% of corporate board members were from 'upper' caste groups.

Given that this is the current state of affairs, if Dalit women do manage to find jobs in private companies, career progression into executive roles is likely to be close to impossible. Other issues include, but are not limited to, low income, hostile work conditions, lack of role models or representation, segregation and exclusion, discrimination in job allocation and lack of growth opportunities.

### **Corporate India's feminist narrative ignores caste**

When I began understanding how patriarchy plays against women in the workplace (technical and commercial), I did not place myself in the milieu as a dark-skinned, obviously Dalit, Christian woman. Unaware of how people perceived me individually, I believed that all women were seen as one disadvantaged group that needed proactive policies to aid growth within the company. But thanks to several debilitating experiences, I realised that the predominant narrative of women being a single homogenous group, facing equal challenges in the workplace is simply not true. Very similar to black women in corporate America, I believe Dalit women's challenges in the workplace are also bound to be multiple and unique.

The entry of Dalit women into private companies takes place despite the different kinds of discrimination in educational institutions and social spaces and the stereotype of being 'weak' and 'non-meritorious' spills into workplaces as well. Lunch table conversations that veer around caste invariably end up in debating the need for caste-based affirmative action policies, which most often are seen as unnecessary by the majority. Being in favour (or being anti-caste) puts one at risk of being discovered, which in all likelihood may result in hostility from colleagues, both male and female. But hiding doesn't always mask one's caste identity either. Given that it is



commonplace, almost casual, to discuss one's caste background, caste markers such as religion, surnames and skin colour give it away fairly easily.

In my experience, the typical profile of a female colleague who is most often encouraged or promoted, is that of a non-Dalit who is fair-skinned, is generally regarded as a physically attractive woman, belongs to the upper or the upper-middle class and is visible to most people.

Although the lack of diversity, in terms of gender, sexuality, disability and ethnicity are key issues, the current feminist narrative of corporate India does not recognise caste as a factor. This is not surprising since caste is never spoken about openly as an issue, but only as a proud identity marker by those belonging to dominant/upper castes. Typical issues such as gender bias, lack of leadership opportunities and poor work-life balance are almost never viewed through a caste lens. The emphasis on intervening when sexist comments are made is not always extended to casteist remarks. This is worsened by the fact that very few Dalit senior leaders (women and men) exist, which if present may help ensure policies that address casteist conduct.

Unlike others, Dalit women also cannot look up to people like Indira Nooyi and others as role models; they don't look similar, or come from similar socio-economic contexts, or voice issues that Dalit women can always relate to. Further, within the Indian corporate set-up that is increasingly becoming multinational, interactions with non-Indian women take place extensively. While this might be beneficial for Dalit women to some extent, in that it offers networking opportunities, power structures that are already in place by virtue of caste, class, skin colour and language, do not work in their favour.

## Gender diversity discourses need an overhaul

It might not be entirely untrue to say that the predominant gender diversity discourse over the past few years, globally, has been heavily influenced by Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In manifesto. This is probably true of India as well. Leaders, both male and female, repeatedly place the onus on women to change, either themselves or their immediate contexts. In other words, lean in. Women's day celebrations within the company are typically reduced to 'advice' sessions for women be better, do better, put your hand up, say yes, say no, seize opportunities, step out and so on. While this is most definitely empowering on one hand, it does not help address systemic patriarchy that is in motion.

Stereotypes and perceptions about single women, motherhood, assertiveness and others, still play a huge role in determining if women will be given opportunities to grow; and if they are, possibly because of a diversity mandate, then comes the question, who would these women be. In an Indian corporate context, although merit and performance are touted to be the only determinants, Dalit women hardly get chosen. In my experience, the typical profile of a female colleague who is most often encouraged or promoted, is that of a non-dalit who is fair-skinned, is generally regarded as a physically attractive woman, belongs to the upper or the upper-middle class and is visible to most people.

Also, in the corporate context, social networking is perceived as a successful strategy to further oneself. This means that caste affiliations could help non-Dalit women where gender fails, leaving Dalit women completely helpless even within 'merit-based' private companies. Similar to black women, Dalit women can be leaning in, following every piece of advice given by non-Indians and Indians alike, but could still be getting nowhere.

What we need at present is a complete overhaul of the gender diversity discourse.

- ❑ While the statement that 'women are good for the bottom line' is most definitely true, it should not be the only reason to recruit and promote women in the workplace. In fact, we must be asking the question, why at all should we provide a business case?



- ❑ Secondly, it is time that we stopped placing the onus for change on women. Male leaders, peers and other colleagues have to be engaged with and protocols to deal with offensive conduct followed meticulously.
- ❑ Thirdly, diversity among women must be valued and encouraged. If leaders, male and female, can take a sincere effort to understand that all women are human beings who come with different characteristics, identities and backgrounds (including marginalised communities defined by caste), perhaps then all women can compete equally; not just with each other but with everyone to aspire for growth that is merit based.

For Dalit women who observe and understand the complexity of such a reality, it can be extremely frustrating to do everything that one can possibly do and still be left behind. What one needs are not just sponsors and solidarity, but an immediate and an urgent redressal of the Indian corporate space, which still continues to be casteist and sexist.

Christina Thomas Dhanaraj works as a business analyst. She is also the co-founder of the Dalit history month collective and a volunteer for #dalitwomenfight. This is a slightly edited version of a piece that first appeared on genderit.org.

"I strongly believe in the movements run by women. If they are truly taken in to confidence, they may change the present picture of society which is very miserable. In the past, they have played a significant role in improving the condition of weaker sections and classes."

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Source: *The wire*



# Minorities enjoy complete freedom in Pakistan

Laraib Akhtar



**PESHAWAR:** Religious minorities in Pakistan have a historical connection to this land and are the valuable citizens of this country. Under the laws and constitution of the country, their interests and rights are secured and they are completely free to follow their culture and religion without any influence.

Pakistan is facing a volatile security situation for the last few decades due to which thousands of people have been killed, mostly Muslims. During this time, not only temples and churches were targeted by also the mosques and shrines were attacked.

Pakistan is widely being criticized for violation of minorities' rights. However, unlike this, the Muslim majority has always raised their voices for the protection of religious minorities. Remembering the incident of Islamic International University, where Parvaiz Masih, though had no relatives inside but he overpowered the bomber and saved the life of 150 Muslim girls.

Hinduism is a global tradition and the second largest religion in Pakistan after Islam; they are found in all provinces of Pakistan but are mostly concentrated in Sindh, there is no denying the fact that Hindus are sons of the soil. Sindh is known for its traditional, tolerant Sufi-culture, diversity, pluralism and for its cultural roots that could be traced back to Hinduism.

A Hindu Panelist Arun Kumar has once said 'I'm committed that Pakistan is a country I belong to, I am the son of this soil, I can never think of leaving my motherland to be settled in a foreign country. My forefathers played an important role in the formation of Pakistan. I've a serious contribution with my communities and with Pakistan as a whole.'

Hindus enjoying the right to life, including property, faith, freedom of movement, vocation, association, education, sports, government services and participating in mainstream Pakistani life, for example cricketers Danish Kaneria and Anil Dalpat, fashion designer Deepak Parvani, Leading TV Actress Sunita Marshall, former Chief Justice of Supreme Court of Pakistan Rana Bhagwandas, Civil Judge Suman Bodani and including top businessman's, doctors, engineers and landlords etc. Punjab Parliamentary Secretary for Minorities and Human Rights, Sardar Mahinder Pall Singh has said: "we are enjoying full freedom, we are all Pakistanis."

Prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan has said that we must ensure that our Hindus feel safe and empowered equally as Muslim populace. We are fulfilling the longstanding demands of Hindus to restore their worship places. We've reopened Peshawar Gurdawara that had been closed since partition, more than 60 million spent to rebuild and renovate every Mandars, Gurdawaras and Churches that were previously demolished, destroyed or converted for other use, over 400 Temples will be recovered, among 22 will be recovered this year, basic facilities like

electricity/sound system will be provided as well.

Government of Pakistan and Hindu community have preserved and protected many prominent Hindu temples and as well they periodically allow small groups of Hindus from India to take part in festivals in Pakistan, they have different worship places like temple located in Sindh, Baluchistan, Indus river, Hindu Gymkhana, Shari Swami Narayan Mender in Karachi.

Prime Minister Imran Khan met the representatives of Sikh and Hindu communities and apprised them of the decisions taken by the government for the welfare of minorities. He discussed different community problems and the PM reiterated the provision of rights to minorities was the priority of the government. Imran Khan doubled employment quota for minorities, as well as Rs140 million stipends for minority religious scholars and students.

Chairman of Pakistan People Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari attended the Hindus festival Holi in Umar Kot. On this occasion, he said: 'Namasty, I also attended 'Diwali' with the residents of 'Mithi', so I decided to celebrate the festival of colours with friends of Umar Kot. We make this day as a national holy day. We promise you to make this country Quaid-e-Azam's Pakistan.'

The Pakistan Hindu Panchayat, Pakistan Hindu Council and the Pakistan Hindu Welfare associations are the primary civic organizations that represent and organize Hindu communities on social, economic, religious and political issues in most of the country.

There are different commissions and for a while, Ministry of Minority Affairs in the Government of Pakistan looked after specific issue concerning Pakistan religious minorities. Former minister for foreign affairs Hina Rabbani Khar has once said that 'our constitution is crystal clear on the rights of minorities to freely profess their religion and visit their places of worship, they are an integral part of the Pakistani society and all citizens are guaranteed equal rights and status, irrespective of religion or caste.'

In 2017, Government of Pakistan made a law for millions of Hindus about Hindu Marriage, this law paved the way for regulations on registration of marriage and divorce and fixes the minimum marrying age for males and females at 18 years old. And as well another law also existed, Article 2-A, freedom of minorities and Article 36, protection of minorities.

According to Gilani Research Foundation Survey carried out by Gallup Pakistan, 87 % Pakistanis including minorities believed that minorities in Pakistan have freedom of speech, freedom for religious expression, and equal rights.

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*Source: Tribal News Network*

# Dalit man dies after being beaten by upper castes for eating alongside them at wedding



Jitendra Das, a 23-year-old Dalit man from Nainbagh tehsil in Tehri district of Garhwal, Uttarakhand died at the Shri Mahant Indireswari Hospital (SMIH) on Sunday after his family alleged that he had been brutally beaten up by upper caste persons for “daring to sit near them and have food at a wedding.” The incident took place on April 26. Das was initially taken to a local community health centre, and subsequently referred to SMIH on April 28 where he was undergoing treatment since then.

Soon after Das's death, his relatives and other villagers sat on a dharna outside Coronation Hospital (where his body was taken for a post-mortem). An inconsolable Pooja Das, his sister, who was among the protestors, told TOI that the wedding where the incident took place was a Dalit wedding organised by her family.

“It was our cousin brother's marriage. My brother made the mistake that he took food from the same counter from where upper caste people were eating. He then sat on a chair next to them.”



“This infuriated them,” she added. “Woh bole yeh neech jaati ka humare sath nahi kha sakta. Khayega to marega (They said that this lower caste cannot sit and eat along with us. If he does, he will be beaten up). My brother was the sole earning member of our

family. What will we do now? The accused are threatening us to withdraw the case,” she added before fainting on the road outside Coronation Hospital where a large police force was deployed on Sunday evening after around 50 villagers threatened to march to CM's house seeking justice for Das.

Sandeep Khanna, one of the panchayat members from Nainbagh who was accompanying the family of the victim to Dehradun told TOI that the police took a lot of time to file an FIR in the case and no arrest has been made till now even when the accused had been booked under SC/ST Act.

“They deployed such a large number of police to stop us but they have failed to arrest a single accused in Tehri,” Khanna said adding that this is not the first case of atrocities against Dalits in the area.

“Around six months back, an upper caste man had beaten a Dalit for not giving him liquor. The victim is still missing. Police hasn't filed an FIR in the case even after repeated attempts,” he alleged.

Talking to TOI, Uttam Singh, circle officer, Narendra Nagar, said that the victim's kin had filed an FIR on April 28 after which police booked seven-named persons under relevant sections of the IPC and SC/ST Act.

SSP Dehradun, Nivedita Kukreti meanwhile said that police is trying to keep the situation under control.

“This matter is of another district. Police is cooperating with the kin but we have to ensure that no untoward incident happens in the city,” she added.

*Source: Times of India*