

Quarterly MINO-VIEW

Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies

New Study Points to India's Other

Epidemic:

Sexual Violence against Dalit Women and Girls

p. 2



MINO-VIEW

Quarterly Magazine

Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in
South Asian Societies

Editor:

Shaheen Hassan

Assistant Editor:

Ashok Kumar

Editorial Board:

Sohail Akhtar

Durdana Najam

Saba Hakeem

Hamid Waleed

Shakeel Gillani

Dr. Rizwana Aizdee

Asma Gul

Nida Eman

Kashif Ghauri

Objectives

The Mino-View, a quarterly magazine, is a humble attempt to cover all dimensions of minority's life and culture not only in Pakistan but in all states of South Asia. It will act as a mirror reflector, reflecting the issues related to the identified minorities and other oppressed classes in the region. The magazine seeks to serve the objective of shedding light on the darkest issues of our social system by voicing the concerns of minorities, and other oppressed sections of the South Asian societies. We will welcome feedback from our respected readers and concerned quarter. We invite social forces from all over the region to join hands for adopting a way towards egalitarianism.

Contact:

Editor,

Ph: +92 42 37115810

Contents

Editorial	i
UN passes Pakistan-led interfaith dialogue resolution	1
New Study Points to India's Other Epidemic: Sexual Violence against Dalit Women and Girls	2
UN experts raise concern over caste-based slavery	4
Aren't we women: Multiple marginalisations of Dalit women in Nepal	5
European Parliament's human rights panel warns India against targeting minorities	8
Rape Cases Surge in Nepal, Activists Question Death Penalty	9
South Asia: Authorities must urgently protect sanitation workers risking their lives on the COVID-19 frontlines	11
Dalit Women Will Get Justice Only If Casteist Judicial System Is Uprooted	12
Sikhs celebrate Guru Nanak's birth anniversary	14



Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation, Lahore
2-Court Street, Lower Mall, Lahore. Ph: +92 42 37115810
Email: sgrhf.lahore@yahoo.com Web: www.sgrhf.org.pk



Editorial

This year too has left many bitter and sweet memories. The outbreak of the Corona pandemic around the world has brought about significant changes which affected every human being regardless of gender, color, ethnicity, religion or caste. From the common man to the gigantic economies, a simple virus has shaken everything. But what has not changed even in this epidemic is caste-based discrimination and the negative thinking associated with it. Far more deadly and dangerous epidemics than Corona seem to be spreading in society and there were some old wounds that became deeper. Increasing incidents of sexual violence against women and caste-based discrimination around the world, especially in various countries of South Asia, have become a stigma on the faces of societies. Internationally, human rights organizations, including the United Nations, continue to raise concerns about caste-based slavery, multiple marginalization of women in certain areas, and violent rape incidents. Dalits or lower caste women living in different countries of South Asia are the most affected women in this regard. In the last 21 years, rape cases recorded in Nepal are 1,814 percent higher. An increase of 45 percent has been seen in the number of Dalit rape cases in the year 2019. Similarly, the number of Dalit rape cases in neighboring country India has reached up to 10 rape cases per day. The studies reveal that in 90% of such cases, at least one accused person was from some dominant caste. As long as this oppressive caste system exists, it is impossible for the suppressed classes to get justice. On the other hand, people belonging to the same Dalit communities who carried out the clean-up work even without any precautionary measures and health related facilities, putting their lives in danger during Corona based lock downs, facing the same neglecting, insulting and discriminating behavior from the other so-called higher castes. The New Year's sun appears to call on the United Nations, the European Union, and other international human rights organizations to play their part in tackling racial, ethnic, and gender-based violence and caste-based slavery. These organizations should impose sanctions on countries where lower classes like Dalits are still facing violent discriminations on the basis of their caste, color, race and gender. In South Asia, where there is a great diversity of religions and cultures, efforts should be made to promote interfaith and intercultural harmony, as Pakistan and Philippines recently introduced a resolution in the UN General Assembly, which was passed & adopted by an overwhelming majority. With such efforts we can lay the foundation of a society where everyone can get justice, where each other's religion and belief is respected, where women's dignity and lives are protected, where everyone has equal access to basic human rights. Can Human Right Organizations play a role in shaping such an ideal society?

Editor

UN passes Pakistan-led interfaith dialogue resolution

The UN General Assembly has adopted the Pakistan-led resolution on "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue," the country's foreign ministry said. The resolution, co-sponsored by Pakistan and the Philippines, was adopted by the UN General Assembly with an overwhelming majority. "This resolution is part of Pakistan's global efforts to promote interfaith harmony, tolerance, respect for each other's religions and values and peaceful co-existence," the ministry said in a statement.

In the wake of growing religious intolerance and racism, especially Islamophobia around the world, the resolution focuses on interreligious and cultural dialogues amongst all stakeholders and advocates combatting intolerance, Xenophobia, discrimination and acts of violence.

It also supported the call of the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations for "mutual respect" and emphasized the importance of realization of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, especially the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

"Prime Minister Imran Khan has repeatedly called upon the international community to counter Islamophobia and promote respect for religious sensitivities. The adoption of this resolution by the UN General Assembly is part of Pakistan's diplomatic efforts inter alia for raising awareness about Islamophobia and countering the defamation of sacred religious personalities and symbols," the statement further said. The resolution also welcomes the Kartarpur initiative by Pakistan, referring to it as a "landmark initiative for interreligious and intercultural cooperation for peace".

Khan inaugurated the Kartarpur Corridor in November last year on the occasion of the 550th Birth Anniversary of the founder of Sikh religion, Baba Guru Nanak Devji. Baba Guru Nanak had spent the last 18 years of his life in Kartarpur.

Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara situated in Narowal district-- some 115 kilometers (71 miles) from the provincial capital Lahore -- is one of the most revered places for the Sikh community as Baba Guru Nanak spent last 18 years of his life there.

Sources: AA (Turkey)

New Study Points to India's Other Epidemic: Sexual Violence against Dalit Women and Girls

A chilling new report by Swabhiman Society and Equality Now highlights how India's justice system is failing survivors of caste-based sexual violence. Even as India reels from the news of the Hathras gang-rape this September, a chilling report produced by Swabhiman Society, a grassroots organisation led by Dalit women, in collaboration with international women's rights organization Equality Now, has found conclusive evidence of how India's justice system is failing survivors of caste-based sexual violence.

The report titled *Justice Denied: Sexual Violence & Intersectional Discrimination - Barriers to Accessing Justice for Dalit Women and Girls in Haryana, India* examines 40 rape cases involving women and girls from the Dalit community in India's northern state of Haryana. It finds that not only are these women and girls more vulnerable to heinous forms of sexual violence - such as gang-rape and murder - than women from other communities, they are also less likely to get justice due to systemic prejudice, patriarchy and corruption.

According to government data, around 10 Dalit women and girls are raped daily across India. However, the real figure is estimated to be far higher. "The stories featured in our report are horrific and heartbreaking, all the more so because of how the criminal justice system largely fails to act," Jacqui Hunt, Director of Equality Now's Eurasia office, said.

"Perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse know they are far less likely to face punishment if they commit a crime against a Dalit woman or girl because attacks are rarely investigated or prosecuted and conviction rates remain abysmally low. Society, law enforcement and India's unofficial justice system of village councils, called panchayats, all conspire to obstruct justice and rally in support of men who stand accused, particularly if they are from a dominant caste," she avers.

In over 80 percent of the cases in the study, all the accused persons involved in the case were from a dominant caste and in over 90 percent of cases, at least



one of the accused persons was from a dominant caste.

Perpetrators often acted in groups and attacks tended to incorporate more severe forms of sexual violence, including gang-rape and murder, when it came to Dalit women and girls. In 97 percent of cases in Haryana, the offender was known to the victim. The highest number of victims came from the age group of 13 to 17 years old. Only 10 percent of cases examined ended with the successful conviction of all those charged and this was just with particularly abhorrent crimes involving a victim who was murdered or under age six.

Out of the 40 cases in the study, 62.5 percent are gang-rape cases, which is significantly higher than the 11-12 percent of gang-rapes in rape cases involving all women and girls in Haryana. "The high percentage of gang-rapes indicates how sexual violence against Dalit women and girls takes the form of a collective exercise of power and authority by dominant caste members," says the report, work on which began in March 2020.

Echoing the events of the Hathras gang-rape case - where the Uttar Pradesh police burned the 19-year-old victim's body without her parents' consent or knowledge after she was reportedly gang-raped and murdered by four upper-caste men known to her - the report has also found that police frequently failed to record or investigate crimes when initially reported and were sometimes abusive or put pressure on survivors to drop cases.

"The horrific gang-rape and death of a young Dalit woman in Hathras in September once again demonstrates the close relationship between sexual violence and India's discriminatory caste system. Extreme instances of sexual violence and cruelty, such as the Hathras victim was subjected to, draw extensive media coverage and outrage in India. Meanwhile, there is little indication that real action is taken to address the common impunity for such crimes, nor to achieve positive, systemic change that ensures prevention of sexual violence and caste-based discrimination and gives survivors access to justice," says Hunt.

Around 42 percent of rape cases in Haryana are dropped during the police investigation itself without charges being filed (compared with the national average of 15 percent rape cases being dropped). One of the reasons is that "due to pressure from high-level politicians to clamp down on caste-based atrocities within the state, district-level authorities aim to bring down the number of rape cases registered under the Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (POA) Act," says the report. This leaves the survivor with no access to the criminal justice system.

Manisha Mashaal, who founded Swabhiman Society in 2012 to provide paralegal support and legal aid to survivors of sexual violence from marginalised communities, states: "One of the biggest challenges in cases of sexual violence is that survivors or the families are pressured into compromises with the accused. Another issue is the lack of quality and effective systems in place to provide the survivors of violence

and their families with immediate social, legal and mental health support along with proper and timely rehabilitation."

Survivors in the study were not given adequate advice about their legal rights and some did not receive compensation payments they were entitled to from the government. In fact, compensation was received by the rape victims only in seven out of the 37 cases in this study in which a police complaint had been filed, of which four were after either public outcry or court orders. Compensation was not received in 62 percent of the cases, while data is unknown for 18 percent of the cases.

Survivors, family members and witnesses also faced threats, coercion and bribery from perpetrators and members of the wider community seeking to stop prosecutions. In over 80 percent of the cases, village councils attempted to interfere with the justice process by using their economic, social and political power to threaten, intimidate and coerce survivors and family members. In almost 60 percent of cases, the survivor or her family was pressured into withdrawing from pursuing a legal case and had to accept a 'compromise' settlement outside the legal system.

"In one case, a Dalit woman was raped by three dominant caste men including the Sarpanch (head) of the village. When the survivor went to the police station to register a FIR, she was threatened with sexual and physical assault in the police station itself by the perpetrators and the Sarpanch threatened to banish her from the village if she pursued the complaint," says the report.

In 32.5 percent of the cases, the survivor and sometimes her family were forced to leave the village or neighbourhood due to the stigma surrounding the rape incident and/or community pressure. Hunt calls on India's government and criminal justice system "to take positive action to effectively address the epidemic of sexual and gender-based violence being inflicted on marginalised women and girls" in India.

Mashaal adds: "It is critical that the barriers to justice faced by Dalit women and girls at the ground level are brought to the attention of our society and government so that caste-based violence is recognised, space is created for Dalit voices to be heard and collective action is taken towards ensuring justice to the survivors and their families."

Source: e SHE

UN experts **RAISE** concern over caste-based **SLAVERY**



UN experts spoke out about the links between discrimination and slavery at the webinar “Contemporary Slavery & Racial Discrimination: Civil Society Support to Survivors during the Pandemic” organised by the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, the UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, the Geneva Human Rights Platform and the UK Mission in Geneva, on 2 December. Several experts raised concern over caste discrimination and caste-based occupations as well as the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable groups. Panellists included slavery survivors, civil society practitioners from Lebanon, India and Brazil, as well as UN experts.

The UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Tomoya Obokata, explained that his mandate has received information of increases in “discrimination and violence against minority groups, such as Roma communities in Europe... and Dalits in Nepal.” He stressed that it is “of utmost importance that states put in place adequate measures now to mitigate the increasing risks of contemporary forms of slavery in the long term.”

“In India, many of the more than 100 million internal migrant workers who were forced to return home due to the pandemic were reportedly subjected to police brutality and stigmatised as virus carriers. If these workers get sick, there is no social safety net to ensure they don’t fall deeper into poverty. Poverty makes lower castes more vulnerable during emergencies and activists fear that the coronavirus will once again reinforce this inequality in many parts of the world.” Mr. Obokata stated.

“In addition, people from marginalised racial and ethnic minority groups, including those affected by caste-based discrimination, have been employed in high numbers in transport, health and cleaning sectors that carry an increased risk of contracting Covid-19,

particularly when employers fail to provide protective equipment or introduce adequate safety measures.”

Tina Stavrinaki, Member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted the importance of implementation, as many countries have domestic laws which prohibit forced or bonded labour but these “practices persist in reality and affect marginalised castes.” Those suffering from slavery are dehumanised to such an extent that they are essentially invisible to national authorities.

She also commented that discrimination plays an important role as a “persistent indicator that justifies coercion and exploitation of specific groups by the rest of the population, here we find deeply rooted discrimination against specific groups.”

Vibhawari Kamble, an Associate Human Rights Officer of the OHCHR, spoke to share her own story, both as a former fellow of the Slavery Fund Fellowship Programme and as a Dalit woman who is a survivor of exclusion, marginalisation and sexual abuse. Ms. Kamble highlighted the practice of manual scavenging in India.

“In India, it is estimated that around four to six million Dalits formerly known as untouchables are engaged in the manual scavenging practice. This refers to the unsafe and manual removal of human excreta from buckets or other containers that are used as a toilet or pit latrine,” Ms. Kamble said.

“I would like to stress that this is a social movement led by Dalit women, who have organised themselves to challenge caste-based occupations that push them into slavery-like practices.”

Ms. Kamble spoke of the importance of the work of the UN slavery fund to support Dalit women in their fight for dignity and justice.

Source: International Dalit Solidarity Network

Aren't we women: Multiple marginalisations of Dalit women in Nepal

On March 11, 2018, Grishma Ram, a 15-year-old Dalit girl, was gang-raped in Saptari. Three were handed down sentences in connection with the case, but four perpetrators are still missing.

On September 23, 2020, Rajendra Bohora, an 'upper-caste' boy not only raped Renu, a 12-year-old Dalit girl but also killed her. Her body was found at a local temple in Bajhang. According to Kantipur, on an average, seven women a day have been raped between March and October 2020. Strikingly, rape has been magnified 1,814 per cent higher in 21 years. Surprisingly, there is no reliable disaggregated data on the rape of Dalit women in Nepal.

During the Covid-19 crisis, violence against Dalits has increased alarmingly. In 2020, Dalit human rights violation cases have gone up 45 per cent higher than in 2019. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) reported 62 Dalit human rights violation cases last year. But, in 2020, within six months, the Samata Foundation collected over 90 cases. In them, 31 Dalits have lost their lives and many have suffered from caste discrimination, physical violence and rape.

Sexual violence has been used as an instrument to suppress women worldwide. In sexual violence, caste and race also play an important role. Despite the key differences in caste and race, there are stark similarities in the histories of systemic oppression, exclusion, exploitation and rich cultures experienced by Dalit women and black women.

The complex intersection of class, race and gender oppression further marginalises African American women in the US. Likewise, violence against women does not only occur because of their gender and class but also because of their caste in Nepal. Interestingly, both the women's movement and the Dalit movement often ignore the multiple marginalisations of Dalit women. The strategy that helped African American women debunk white feminism and the black movement can help us dismantle the idea of dominant caste-centric feminism and gender-insensitive Dalit movement.



In this context, I will explore key ideas of bell hooks on the intersection of race, class and gender and how these ideas may be relevant for Nepal.

Who is bell hooks?

In 1981, bell hooks popularised the idea of intersectionality, without using the term, in her groundbreaking book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. This book argues that the interplay of racism and sexism forced black women to be at the lowest rung in American society.

Intersectionality recognises that all women do not share the same level and kind of discrimination just because they are women. Because of systemic oppression, some women face more discrimination than others. Intersectionality examines the interplay of race, class and gender dynamics.

Kimberly Crenshaw, an American law professor, coined the term "intersectionality" over 30 years ago. It is, she aptly said, "a lens for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other."

hooks exposed sexism within the black civil rights freedom movement. She unearthed how multiple forms of discrimination intersected. Not only white men but also black men mistreated black women. Sexism devastated the black family. hooks also criticised white feminism for not embracing black women's voices.

hooks was born in 1952 in Kentucky, a racially segregated state in the southern part of the US. Growing in the South profoundly impacted her

writing. She attended segregated public schools with low resources and a few facilities. But, dedicated teachers, single black women and her mother's teaching assisted her to be a good student.

The American civil war had officially abolished slavery in 1865, but it did not bring equality. Death threats and lynchings were common for African Americans who pushed for change. Laws kept African Americans socially distant from whites by segregating schools, restaurants, buses, restrooms, drinking fountains and by preventing interracial marriage. African Americans worked as servants, factory workers and domestic workers. In the 1960s, even college-educated African Americans had limited options: teach in a school or work for the federal post office.

In the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans struggled to gain equal rights. In 1954, the *Brown vs Board of Education* Supreme Court case declared, "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." Racially segregated schools became unconstitutional.

This decision emboldened African Americans. They started grassroots non-violent movements, protests and rallies with whites. The Greensboro, North Carolina sit-ins are an example. On February 1, 1960, four college students went to a whites-only lunch counter and asked for coffee, but they were rudely denied. They waited patiently to be served. They were attacked. Many college students organised other sit-ins. In 1963, thousands of people marched in Washington DC, where Martin Luther King Jr gave his famous 'I have a dream' speech; it became a slogan for justice.

In the women's movement in the US in the 1960 and 1970s, women demanded equal rights and opportunities. Betty Friedan's book 'Feminine Mystique' (1963) challenged traditional women's roles. Women yearned to pursue higher education, engage in politics, control their reproductive lives and live life not limited to 'truly feminine' activities such as housework, marriage and children-rearing alone.

However, hooks criticised both the women's movement and the civil rights movement. On the one hand, some white women's rights activists supported a racist social order. On the other hand, most male



black civil rights leaders did not demand equality for the sexes. In most organizations, men made policy decisions whereas women were limited to attending to the telephone or fixing coffee. Moreover, black men demanded women to be supportive and patient so that black men could regain their manhood.

Bell hooks's inspiration

Hooks learned from American abolitionist Sojourner Truth. On May 29, 1851, Truth gave a history-making talk at a women's conference in Ohio. During the convention, because Truth did not hear anything about the experience of African American women like her, she rose to speak.

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could hear me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne 13 children and seen most all sold off to slavery

and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Truth's talk had a deep impact on hooks because she questioned white women about black women. She asked: don't black women count as women? And hooks asked the same question a hundred years later in *Ain't I a woman: Black Women and Feminism*.

Many activists influenced hooks, such as Toni Morrison, Paulo Freire, Martin Luther King and her mother Rosa Bell. "If there's a book you really want to read but it hasn't been written yet," Morrison told her, "then you must write it." Consequently, hooks published *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. A man laughed at her during her research, asking, "What is there to say about black women?" She was not discouraged; the man's laughing fuelled her to continue research.

At first, because mainstream feminists did not recognize the overlaps of class, race and sexism, hooks' painstaking work *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* was not well received. But, later on, the book became path-breaking in feminist thinking.

Why bell hooks' ideas matter to Nepal?

If we were to replace race with caste and closely examine intersectionality in relation to hooks' works, we would learn a great deal to interrogate multiple forms of oppression faced by Dalit women.

In Nepal, not all women are from the dominant caste; and not all Dalits are men. hooks' ideas echo a thousand miles away now more than ever. The strategy that helped to debunk white feminism can help us dismantle the idea of dominant caste-centric feminism.

Nepal's feminist movement mostly centers on high-caste, hilly, Hindu, elite women. It often neglects diversity among women. It not only ignores Dalit women but also other marginalised women. For example, even though sexual violence among Dalits, Madhesi and indigenous women are alarmingly high compared to the dominant caste, they do not get much attention. The fact is that so-called high-caste women's empathy extends primarily to women just like them. The moment they find caste, ethnicity, region and language differences, victims do not get as much attention.



The Dalit movement reflects the Nepali society. Dalit women endure sexism not only in the family but also within the Dalit movement. Dalit women in politics experience multiple forms of sexism: often Dalit women are not promoted in decision-making positions; Dalit men do not share their party's important information; competent Dalit women are often sidelined; they are discouraged to organise separate Dalit women committee; and despite seniority, Dalit women leaders are often ignored and not invited as chief guests.

In addition, sexism and casteism manifest blatantly in political organisations. Nepal Dalit Mukti Sangathan, a Dalit organisation affiliated with the Nepal Communist Party (previously known as Nepal Utpedit Dalit Jatiya Mukti Samaj) never had a Dalit woman chairperson in 32 years. Similarly, the Nepal Dalit Sangh, an organisation affiliated with Nepali Congress has not had a Dalit women president since 1992. Surprisingly, Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh, one of the oldest women political wings of Nepal Communist Party, has also not elected any Dalit woman as a president since its inception in the early 1950s.

hooks' idea of intersectionality helps us think beyond women as a 'single uniform category'. The stories of Grishma, Renu and many more Dalit women, who are raped and murdered, show the importance of seeing how caste, class and gender overlap.

Sadly, Dalit women are treated as a part of the problem. But, they are the solution. Dalit women have extraordinary endurance, infinite love and respect for everyone, embracing different ideas, endless resistance and enthusiasm to learn every day. These attributes make Dalit women a powerful force today.

Source: Online Akhbar

European Parliament's human rights panel warns India against targeting minorities



The head of European Parliament's panel urged the Narendra Modi government to meet its pledge to promote and protect human rights.

The European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights cautioned India against targeting religious minorities in the country, particularly Muslims. It urged the Narendra Modi government to meet its pledge to promote and protect human rights. In a statement, Maria Arena, the chief of the panel, said that protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act have led to "arbitrary detentions and an unnecessary loss of life". She said that journalists and peaceful critics were being arrested under "draconian counter-terrorism and sedition laws", adding that the authorities were targeting human rights activists.

"Marginalised communities, religious minorities, particularly Muslims, a vocal and vibrant civil society and critics of government policies have been under increasing pressure for a long time," her statement read. Arena cited an Amnesty International India report and said that the Delhi Police had committed human rights violations during the February 2020 communal riots in the city, which left over 50 people dead, hundreds injured and thousands displaced.

"In the absence of action by India's authorities since the outbreak of the violence, I strongly support the call for a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into all human rights violations committed by law enforcement officials. There should also be a fully independent, public and transparent inquiry into the role of the police in failing to prevent the violence that broke out and even aiding it."

- European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights

In September, over 200 eminent personalities had urged the government to release former Jawaharlal Nehru University student Umar Khalid and all those falsely implicated for protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act. A statement was released

by pioneering linguist Noam Chomsky, leading American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, scholar Homi K Bhabha, writers Arundhati Roy, Meena Kandasamy, Rajmohan Gandhi, Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie, filmmaker Mira Nair, historian Irfan Habib, journalist P Sainath and actor Ratna Pathak Shah, among many others. The signatories expressed concern at the arrests of democratic voices in India.

On September 23, Progressive International, a global organisation, had also condemned the government for targeting dissenters and protestors "known for their decades of social, political and democratic work" and charging them under anti-terror and national security laws in cases pertaining to the Delhi violence and the 2018 Bhima-Koregaon incident.

Amnesty closure

In her statement, Arena also expressed concern that human rights group Amnesty International India was forced to halt work in the country. On September 29, the organisation had accused the Centre of having frozen its bank accounts as punishment for speaking out about alleged rights abuses. The move was widely criticised by various organisations. The United States, the United Kingdom as well as the European Union have also raised concerns about the government's investigation into Amnesty International India. India has defended its decision, saying that other countries should not "condone contravention of Indian laws by any entity".

The chief of the subcommittee reminded Indian government of its commitment to "continue to foster the genuine participation and effective involvement of civil society in the promotion and protection of human rights." She added that India should meet this pledge in a way that is worthy of the global role model the country wished to become. "It is high time for India to translate words into action," she said, requesting the European Union to address these concerns within the EU-India Human Rights Dialogue.

Source: Scroll in



Rape Cases Surge in Nepal, Activists Question Death Penalty

On March 11, 2018, Grishma Ram, a 15-year-old Dalit girl, was gang-raped in Saptari. Three were handed down sentences in connection with the case, but four perpetrators are still missing.

On September 23, 2020, Rajendra Bohora, an 'upper-caste' boy not only raped Renu, a 12-year-old Dalit girl but also killed her. Her body was found at a local temple in Bajhang. According to Kantipur, on an average, seven women a day have been raped between March and October 2020. Strikingly, rape has been magnified 1,814 per cent higher in 21 years. Surprisingly, there is no reliable disaggregated data on the rape of Dalit women in Nepal.

During the Covid-19 crisis, violence against Dalits has increased alarmingly. In 2020, Dalit human rights violation cases have gone up 45 per cent higher than in 2019. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) reported 62 Dalit human rights violation cases last year. But, in 2020, within six months, the Samata Foundation collected over 90 cases. In them, 31 Dalits have lost their lives and many have suffered from caste discrimination, physical violence and rape. What started as an anthem protesting violence against women in Chile in 2019 has sparked a nationwide movement in Nepal. On November 7, around 1,000 young Nepalese women and men took to the streets to bring attention to rising rape cases and sexual violence in the region using the Chilean

anthem "The Rapist is You!"

This was the second time that the group Ajhai Kati Sahane had protested on Nepal's streets. The group staged an earlier protest on October 10, in response to rising sexual violence in the Himalayan nation. This time, around 25 activists in each of Nepal's 40 districts took part in the flash mob, draped in black and holding placards against rape, alongside the sound of the traditional Newari musical instrument.

The protests were prompted after a 12-year-old Dalit girl from Bajhang district went missing on September 23. Her semi-naked body was recovered by family members at the nearby temple. Autopsy reports confirmed that the young girl was sexually assaulted. That was not the only case to rock the nation that month. On September 15, a teenage gang-rape victim took her own life in Saptari after she was reportedly forced into an out-of-court settlement by the village elders. Activists have also noted a spike in rape and acid attack cases during the COVID-19 pandemic, including a gang rape of a migrant woman in the quarantine facilities of an empty school.

Prakriti Bhattarai Basnet, one of the key campaigners of Ajhai Kati Sahane and the founder of Political Literacy for Women, stated that they started the group not just in response to rising sexual violence in Nepal but also against the call for "hanging the rapist."



While there has been a renewed push for death penalty for rapists, youth activists and human rights organizations question the effectiveness of such a policy.

“In our country one politician is more powerful than the system itself. In a country where the system is not powerful and the person is more powerful, rapists are not going to be hanged,” said Basnet. “People who don't have voices are going to be hanged.”

In the 1990s, Nepal was one of the first countries in South Asia to abolish the death penalty. Its 2015 constitution explicitly prohibits laws that prescribe capital punishment. Nepal is also a signatory to various human rights charters like the Second Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which mandate abolition of the death penalty. Nevertheless, similar incidents of sexual violence in Bangladesh and their introduction of death penalty has impacted the movement.

“We were fighting against the narrative and the narrative was being built in neighboring countries,” Basnet added. “Further, the thing that impacted the most was when actors and big Kollywood [Nepalese film industry] celebrities came out in support of the [hang the rapist] movement.”

Data from the Nepal police shows that the reporting of cases increased significantly in 2019-20 to 2,144 cases of rape and 687 cases of attempted rape in comparison to the 1,480 reported cases of rape and 727 cases of attempted rape in 2017-18. Basnet partly attributes this to the increased reporting of sexual violence in Nepal. There is rising awareness about the issue after widespread protests in 2018 in response to the rape and murder of a 13-year-old Nirmala Panta.

However, rape culture remains unaddressed. For

instance, in a recent television interview right after the Saptari case, Ram Narayan Bidari, a National Assembly member, said that 90 percent of rape cases involving adults were “not rape cases.” He added, “the trend of enjoying with consent while the relationship is sound and then making rape accusation when it goes sour has been increasing.”

Just last year, the speaker of Nepal's lower house of Parliament, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, had to step down and resign after being accused of rape by an employee. By February 2020, he was acquitted of all charges, resulting in nationwide outrage over the “ingrained impunity” in the system.

After the first protest, anti-rape activists also faced an online backlash and a Facebook group was created by 16-20 year old boys called “Balatkari Sangathan” (rapist association), where young boys and men were boasting about raping women and making lewd and hateful comments about girls. The 19-year-old admin of the Facebook group was later arrested.

“With access to a lot of information, we are reinforcing that kind of mindset as well, particularly when we see one of the prominent parliamentarians saying that rape happens with the consent of girls and other politicians legitimizing this behavior,” said Basnet. “Social media is not convincing the misogynists but poking them.”

When it comes to Nepal's female parliamentarians, Basnet believes that while women in politics have increased due to Nepal's mandatory quota that requires 33 percent of parliamentarians to be women, these women are not in powerful enough positions in their political parties to talk about women's issues if their party is not talking about them.

Source: The Diplomat

South Asia: Authorities must urgently protect sanitation workers risking their lives on the COVID-19 frontlines



As the UN observed World Toilet Day on 19th November, Amnesty International, WaterAid and the International Dalit Solidarity Network called on the authorities in Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to take immediate action to protect the sanitation workers who have been risking their lives as Covid-19 frontliners.

According to a joint statement released by these organisations, across South Asia, workers cleaning toilets and streets, emptying latrine pits and maintaining sewers are faced with acute health and safety risks. However, they lack adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), training support to cope with risks, job security, social security, health insurance and access to hand washing facilities.

The three organisations have appealed to the national governments and local authorities in Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to urgently provide immediate support and implement protective measures to help sanitation and waste workers cope with the heightened risks of the pandemic. The caste dimension of sanitation work in these countries also means that workers are highly stigmatised and discriminated against when accessing services or seeking other occupations, the statement said.

A new research by WaterAid in Nepal, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh showed that the Covid-19 pandemic worsened the situation for the vast majority of these workers. Some have even been redeployed to service Covid-19 quarantine centers with limited training on Covid-19 related risks or how to use PPE, the study found.

The WaterAid study further found that these workers' financial security has also been affected either due to increased but non-compensated working hours in some cases and reduced demand for their services in others. Likewise, their transportation costs increased due to lockdowns and many had to buy face masks and other equipment that their employers did not regularly provide.

"Sanitation workers are the hidden workforce keeping towns and cities in South Asia functioning throughout the pandemic, but they work in very poor and too often life-threatening conditions and are subject to stigma and discrimination based on caste and religion," Vanita

Suneja, South Asia Regional Advocacy Manager at WaterAid, said. "Covid-19 and related lockdowns have exacerbated these risks, especially among the many sanitation workers informally employed. Most female sanitation workers are informal workers risking their lives every day. The safety and dignity of these workers have been disproportionately affected."

The International Dalit Solidarity Network has campaigned to raise the plight of low caste sanitation workers, being lowered into sewers or cleaning dry latrines with no protective equipment. Many of these workers "inherit" these occupations due to their designated status in the caste system. This status has travelled with them to countries like Bangladesh, where many street sweepers are Dalits and live in segregation in sweepers' colonies.

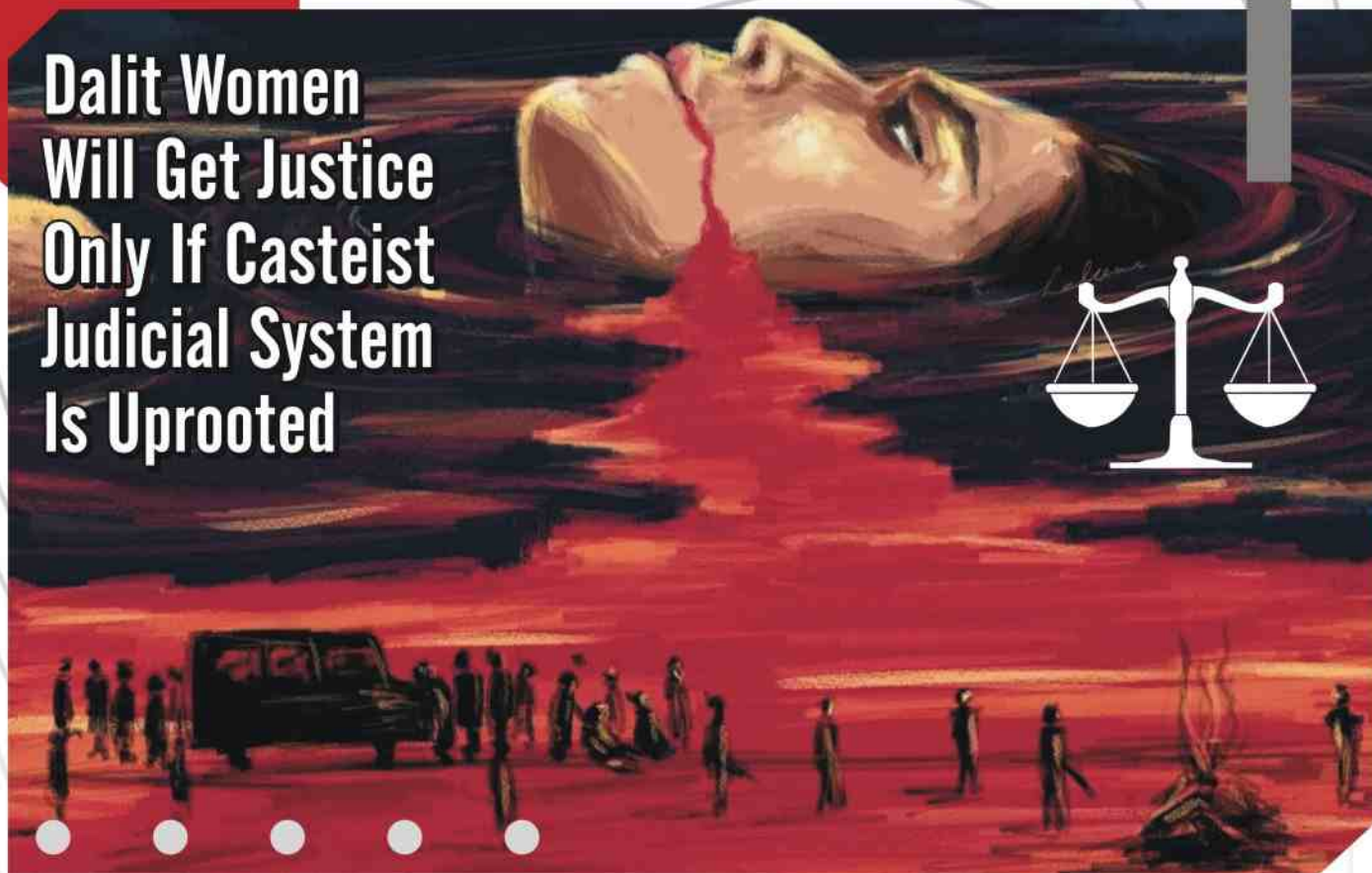
"These workers are not asking for a medal. They are asking for their rights and dignity to be respected and that the same concern authorities are showing for the health and safety of other segments of the population is also extended to them," said Meena Varma, Executive Director of the International Dalit Solidarity Network.

Issues of stigma and discrimination against sanitation workers are reported across South Asia. Amnesty International has appealed for action in India urging the government to ensure dignity and protection of sanitation workers. An estimated five million sanitation workers, mostly belonging to Dalit communities, are forced to work as manual scavengers to clean faecal sludge in sewers, septic tanks, etc.

"Many of the sanitation workers are Dalits, the so-called lowest caste in South Asia. Because of their descent, they are historically subjected to extreme forms of indignity, oppression, exclusion and discrimination. Their already marginalised position is even further compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic," said David Griffiths, Director of the Office of the Secretary-General at Amnesty International. "If beggars believe that anyone should be forced into the practice of manually cleaning and carrying human excrement, often simply because of their birth. Governments must take urgent action to protect the rights of these workers and immediately stop anybody from being subject to this illegal, degrading and inhumane treatment."

Source: Kathmandu Post

Dalit Women Will Get Justice Only If Casteist Judicial System Is Uprooted



The Hathras incident in Uttar Pradesh is truly heart-wrenching and it is weighing us down to know how four Thakur men raped a young Dalit girl and left her to die. After the girl died, her body was doused with petrol and set alight without the consent of her family. This shows the attitude of the administration who, even now, does not respect the dignity of Dalit women. Nor is the administration taking the violence against Dalit women seriously. We do not see the government or the administration making any effort to help the affected family's quest for justice, or to provide relief of any kind. Instead, the current government and administration is threatening the family. This is not the first instance of such pressure tactics being used by the government and administration. We have seen similar cases before Hathras.

Often the women of the victim's family are made to face violence in order to make sure that the family is not able to speak up because of the fear of their honour being lost. In this way, upper caste people threaten Dalit families and pose a challenge to them so they know that if they ever consider going ahead and filing a complaint against the accused, the women of the community will have to face violence. This is how the families are silenced.

In the present case, the upper castes had already, on

many occasions, shown their malice towards the Dalit family, to the extent that on one previous occasion they had attacked the victim's father and had even chopped off his finger. The family had been raising their voices constantly against the injustice meted out to them and this young girl was targeted in an attempt to silence them. This is typically the case with violence faced by Dalit women at the hands of upper castes.

We have had to witness this kind of behaviour over the centuries and we put up with it even now. Despite this being the case, nobody is willing to accept that the violence and atrocities that Dalit women have to face is an outcome of caste, patriarchy and the financial dependence on upper castes. This truth is not accepted by the administration, the media or savarna people. Because this truth has been refuted time and again, the violence against Dalit women has only kept increasing and Dalit women have had to pay for it with their lives.

How violently must a person be crushed in order to awaken the conscience of these people? Will our conscience only be awakened when someone loses their life? When there was a gangrape in Delhi in 2012, the whole country took to the streets. Every person's sympathy was with the victim in her quest for justice, yet in this same country 10 Dalit women are raped every day and nobody bats an eyelid. To the extent that

the mainstream media does not even cover it as news. Even if by some chance the case does get covered by the media, there will be a few people who will come and protest and have a candlelight march or two. We will see the case being documented through a few platforms and then everything will go quiet.

And what happens then? Nobody even bothers to find out and ask the victim's family what they need to live their lives and to pursue justice. Today too, I am seeing the same spectacle. It makes me worried as well as happy. I am happy because so many people have taken to the streets to seek justice for one of our Dalit sisters and are helping to highlight this case. I am worried because I hope that this does not become a story of a few days and the case does not get suppressed. From the experiences of the last 10 years, we can see so many cases where every effort was made to lobby for justice at every level. This is not the first time in our experience that a Dalit girl has been raped and subsequently murdered. We do not know how many women and girls have had to and continue to become victims of such heinous crimes.

In most cases, the administration takes the same line: the girl's character was bad, she was having an affair, or her family members have murdered her. Then the family is subjected to macro analysis or they are charged with a counter case. These are the strategies they use to pressurise the victim's family and to silence the voice of justice. This is what we are seeing in the Hathras case as well. From the government, to police, administration, commission or the judicial system all these mechanisms have failed to deliver justice. Dalit women do not get justice; they do not get to live with dignity and they are not considered as human beings.

I remember Delta's case well. The situation of the Hathras case was the same as Delta's case and her family's. In that case too, many organisations raised their voices; there were candle marches and debates on television. Every strategy that could be adopted to give the victim's family justice was used, but no justice was done to the family till date. Similarly, there was a case in Haryana where a Dalit girl was raped and the family was subsequently subjected to narcoanalysis. There was a CBI probe in that case too and the family is harassed even now, but no justice is served.

There was another case in Haryana where a young Dalit girl who was going to write her exams with her teacher was abducted, raped and subsequently burnt with cigarettes and murdered. To get her post mortem

done, we had brought her dead body all the way to AIIMS in Delhi. In that case too, there were protests, candlelight marches and we were subjected to lathi charge, but there has been no justice done. The police administration said the same thing that they always say in the cases of young Dalit women: "The girl was having an affair."

How long will the police administration keep using this pathetic excuse to suppress the voice of justice? It is after all a big truth that the very police administration and judicial system that Dalit women approach to seek justice works against their interests. In such circumstances the question that arises is: how long will this keep happening to our Dalit women and children and for how long must they be deprived of justice? Today again we are asking for a CBI probe in the Hathras case; today we are again asking the administration to do justice and are demanding the CM's resignation. But these demands have been made before in many cases. In most cases though, Dalit women have not received justice. In this situation, the question that arises is: what must we do to sustain the hope for justice and how do we get justice without delay and further difficulties?

Most of the administration suffers from a casteist mindset. Influenced by the ideology of caste, those conducting the investigation keep the victim and the victim's family deprived of justice in direct and indirect ways. In these circumstances, expecting them to serve justice is a huge mistake. Now the question before us is: how long will our young Dalit girls have to keep facing this casteist mindset? For how long will our lives be stuck in this quagmire? Do Dalit women not have the right to forge ahead and see dreams of our own?

Is the caste system destroying Dalit women's dreams before they are realised? Dalit girls could have been doctors or teachers in large numbers but the caste system has destroyed them forever. It is my belief that it is now time to uproot and do away with this caste system, creating a new and safe society for our young girls. Today I appeal to all of you to not sit back and rest until our sister in the Hathras case does not get justice. If we want to strengthen our fight for justice, we need to attack this anti-women and anti-Dalit governmental mechanism of the caste system. We will have to fight a long fight so that we can feel some pride as citizens of this country and so that we may live.

Jai Bhim, Jai Savitri!

Source: Feminism in India

Sikhs celebrate Guru Nanak's birth anniversary

Sikh pilgrims from the country and abroad, including 600 from India, participated in the 551st birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak on 30th Nov 2020.

The three-day celebrations of birth anniversary of the founder of the Sikh faith began at Nankana Sahib, Kartarpur, Hassan Abdal and other places in Pakistan.

Langar was arranged for all the guests. Dozens of Sikh women cut up vegetables, kneaded flour and made bread in the kitchens of Nankana Sahib for feeding the hungry and KarSeva is considered a religious duty in the Sikh faith.

Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Pir Noor ul Haq Qadri spoke at the central ceremony at Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Baba Guru Nanak. He said that despite rising cases of coronavirus, the government ensured holding of the birth anniversary under strict implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs). "We do not want followers of any religion to think that there is any discrimination being committed against them," he said. The minister told the audience that the work on Baba Guru Nanak University would be completed at the stipulated time and that a link road from Lahore-Sialkot Motorway would be built for Kartarpur Corridor so that the followers of Guru Nanak could reach Kartarpur Sahib from Nankana Sahib easily.

Mr Qadri said: "Pakistan treats everyone equally without any discrimination and has promised to remove all hurdles in the way of interfaith harmony." He said all minorities in India were facing brutalities at the hands of the majority Hindus. The minister said Baba Guru Nanak was a great name for humanity and he would be remembered forever. He congratulated the followers of Baba Guru Nanak on his 551st birth





anniversary. He also distributed gifts among the guests.

Punjab Minister for Minorities Affairs Ijaz Alam Augustine, Chairman of the National Commission for Minorities Chela Ram, MPA Mahindarpal Singh and Indian Sikh leaders, besides about 4,000 local and foreign pilgrims, attended the ceremonies. Later, a Palki procession was taken out from Gurdwara Janamsthan in Nankana Sahib.

In a video message, the Prime Minister Imran Khan said that rights of all minorities in the country would be safeguarded and their religious sites protected. The Prime Minister assured the Sikh community that his government would protect their holy sites in Pakistan, including the two most revered at Nankana Sahib and Kartarpur. Both the sites are sacred to Sikhs just like Makkah and Madina are to the Muslims, he added.

Mr Khan said the government would extend every possible assistance and facility to the Sikh

community, citing the example of the recently-revamped railway station in Hassan Abdal. "The policy of our government is to protect religious minorities in Pakistan and their holy places, may they be churches, temples or Buddhist monasteries," the Prime Minister said.

The three-day celebrations of Baba Guru Nanak's birth anniversary began on 26th November in Nankana Sahib with the arrival of over 600 pilgrims from India through the Wagah border.

The main ceremony took place at Gurdwara Janamasthan in Nankana Sahib. Celebrations also included the Nagar Kirtan procession, followed by Bhogritual at night.

The prime minister had opened the Kartarpur Corridor last year on the occasion of Baba Guru Nanak's 550th birth anniversary as a goodwill gesture to facilitate Sikhs within the country and from across the border.

Source: Dawn