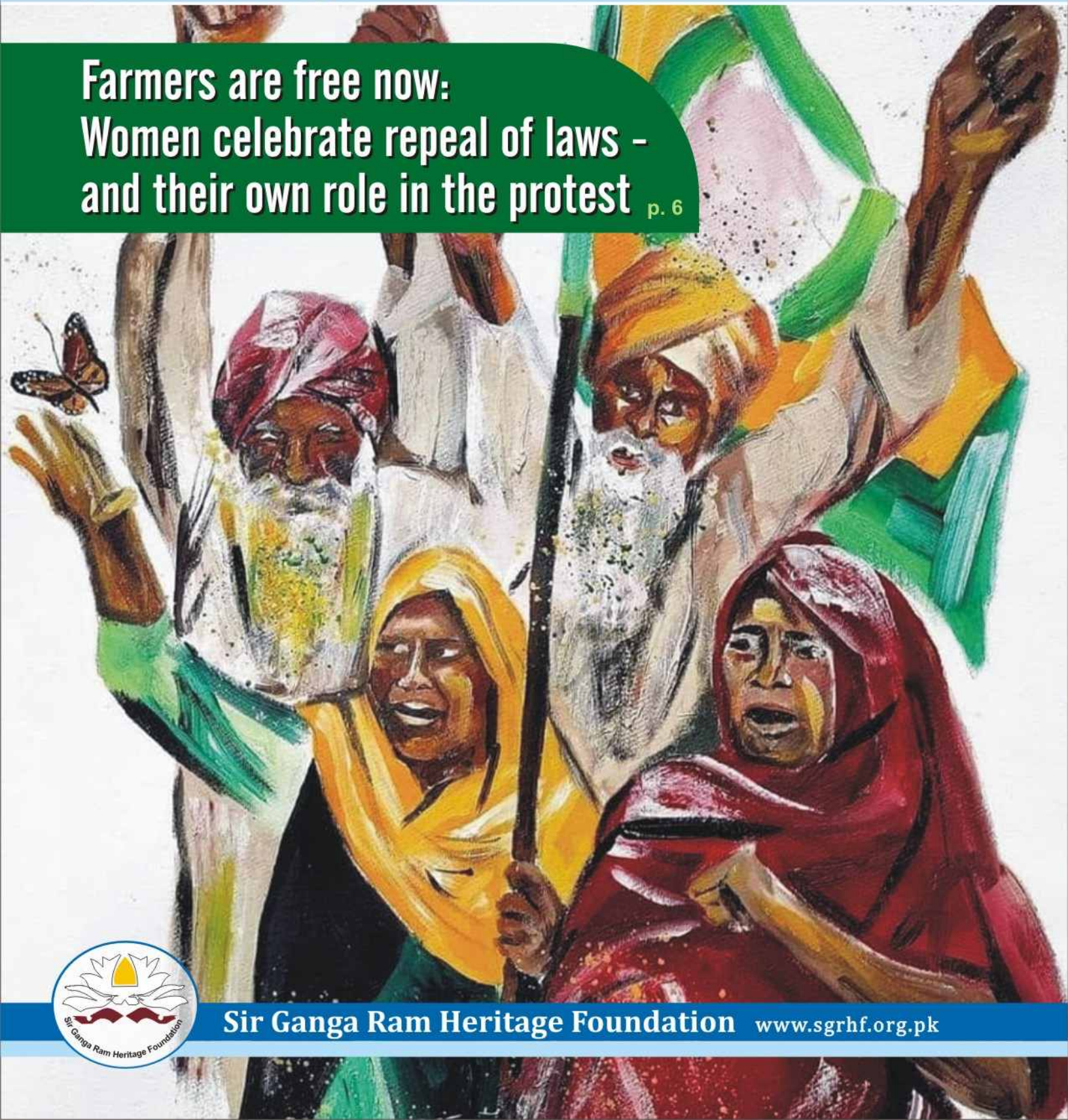


Quarterly MINO-VIEW

Vol: 09 Issue: 04
Oct. - Dec, 2021

Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies

**Farmers are free now:
Women celebrate repeal of laws -
and their own role in the protest** p. 6



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MINO-VIEW

Quarterly Magazine

Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in
South Asian Societies

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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.

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Editorial

One more year passed away with all the pain, grief, happiness and successes. The final issue of Mino View 2021 is in your hand, all the year we have tried to highlight the contemporary issues of Minorities and other marginalized communities of South Asia with this tiny little academic effort. Covid-19 featured as main core issue of 2021 that enhanced the existing miseries and problems of marginalized groups in all South Asian region. Muslims, Christians, Sikh, Dalits all faced discrimination and violence as minorities in their daily lives. States action is unfortunately as weak and low as it had been always in most of the countries in the region. Society's mind set also not much changed that reflected in different incidents against Marginalized and news published or telecasted in the media. Civil society, human rights organizations and international forums voicing their concerns against discrimination against the marginalized people almost in all the world but descent voices are not welcomed by most of the states in South Asia. Protest rallies against human rights violation and legal battles are all the part and parcel of 2021. All that 2021 witnessed now has become history. But not before registering the one great success story of farmers fighting for their rights against the three laws bill passed by the Indian government In September 2020, in reaction Sikh farmers sat in protest and demanded to withdraw the laws, their protest stands for more than a year as a result it forced the Indian government to repeal the 3 farm laws bill. Farmers believe that the three agriculture laws passed would benefit large corporate and immensely hurt them. The controversial laws led to widespread agitations by Sikh farmers, who have been camping at Delhi borders for several months. Hundreds of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and UP, have lost their lives during the more than a year long agitation. Women, children, older person and young farmers all stand united in protection of their rights for their future generations. They left their homes family, lively hood and faced hard extreme weathers. They also battled with anti media campaign against them and their historic long fight for their rights ended with the success.

Editor

World inequality report: India stands out as a very unequal country

Bharat Dogra
& Newslick



The World Inequality Report (WIR) is widely regarded as a highly credible and comprehensive report on the extent of inequalities in world. The latest WIR for year 2022 has been released very recently. It has been authored by Lucas Chancel, co-director of the World Inequality Lab, with other coordinators, including France's Thomas Piketty and presents a damning indictment of the very high level of inequalities in India. As presented in WIR, the levels of wealth and income inequalities in India are among the worst that prevail in the leading countries of the world. These statistics for wealth inequality tell us that the share of the bottom 50% of the households in wealth is just 6% in India. At the same time the share of the top 10% in wealth is 65% in India, a very high figure indeed. What is perhaps even more shocking is that the share of the top 1 per cent in wealth is a whopping 33%.

The average household wealth in India is equal to 35,000 Euro or Rs 983,010, as per the data shared by the World Inequality Lab. The bottom 50% own almost nothing, with an average wealth of 4,200 Euro or Rs 66,280. The middle class is relatively poor, with an average wealth of only 26,400 Euro or Rs 723,930, the report said. This constitutes 29.5% of the total wealth. The top 10% of the population have an average wealth at 231,300 Euros or Rs 6,354,070. Coming now to income inequality the share of the bottom 50% in income is just 13% in India. On the other hand the share of the top 10% in income is 57% and the share of just the top 1% is as high as 22%. As per the report, the average national income of the Indian adult population is 7,400 Euro or Rs 204,200. While the bottom 50% earns 2,000 Euro or Rs 53,610, the top 10% earns more than 20 times more (42,500 Euro or Rs 1,166,520).

Here it should be pointed out that the overall income levels in India are lower than in many other countries which have high inequality. Here the impact of inequality is likely to be seen much more in terms of denial of basic needs. For this reason, although reduction of inequality is needed everywhere, it is needed much more in countries like India where its impact in terms of denial of basic needs is much higher. WIR has also drawn attention to the shameful reality that the inequality levels in India are returning to the very high levels seen in colonial times. The report notes, "Indian income inequality was very high under British colonial rule (1858-1947), with a top 10% income share around 50%. After independence, socialist-inspired five-year plans contributed to reducing this share to 35-

40%. Since the mid-1980s, deregulation and liberalisation policies have led to one of the most extreme increases in income and wealth inequality observed in the world. While the top 1% has largely benefited from economic reforms, growth among low and middle-income groups has been relatively slow and poverty persists." It is really a very shameful reflection on the development and economic priorities followed by the ruling regimes that inequalities are now returning almost to the situation existing in colonial times.

Gender and Carbon Inequality

"Gender inequalities in India are very high. The female labour income share is equal to 18%. This is significantly lower than the average in Asia (21%, excluding China)," the report stated. This particular value in India is one of the lowest in the world and only just higher than the average share in the Middle East, where the share of females in national income is at 15%. With regards to carbon emission, the report notes that the average person in the "bottom 50% of the Indian population is responsible for, on average, five times fewer emissions than the average person in the bottom 50% in the European Union and ten times fewer than the average person in the bottom 50% in the US." "India is a low carbon emitter: the average per capita consumption of greenhouse gas is equal to just over two tCO₂e. These levels are typically comparable with carbon footprints in sub-Saharan African countries. The bottom 50%, middle 40% and top 10% respectively consume 1, 2 and 9 tCO₂e/capita," the report further notes.

Quality of Data Deteriorating

Lastly, the WIR has also noted that the quality of data needed to monitor inequalities has deteriorated in recent times. Earlier India used to be known to have some of the best statistical systems among developing countries. So the new strategy of the ruling classes appears to be to reduce access to the kind of information that can reveal the increasing inequalities, exploitation and injustices in India. It is really sad and tragic that so many freedom fighters made the greatest sacrifices for the freedom of India, but as we move towards the 75 years of independence the inequality levels are going back to the years of colonial times. Surely something needs to be done to change this shameful reality.

(Compiled by us based on an article by Bharat Dogra and an article in Newslick.)

Dalit, tribal women among worst victims of India's hunger crisis



Suchitra

Kalahandi, India - On September 3, Ranjita Majhi, a 33-year-old Kui speaking Khond woman in the eastern Indian state of Odisha, gave birth to a baby boy. She was elated as she had taken a 30,000 rupees (\$400) loan for the delivery. Since she was severely anaemic, her health complications prevented a normal delivery. As a result, Majhi had to travel 60km (37 miles) to a government hospital in Bhawanipatna district, where she had a caesarean section. All was well in the Majhi household for four days. But then the child died. "I don't know how to repay my loans, now the child for whom I took the loan is also not with me. They said they do not even know how he died," she told Al Jazeera, wiping her tears. Bhawanipatna's district hospital doctors claim they also do not know how the child died. But activist Roshnara Mohanty from Ekta Parishad NGO hints at malnutrition. She says access to forest is prime for tribal women and prevents them from being intergenerationally malnourished. In 2009, Majhi left her Rampur village in Kalahandi to move to Madanpur Rampur town. She and her husband belong to the Kui-speaking Khond tribe, but were landless. With decreasing access to forest, they migrated to the town in search of livelihood opportunities and started working as casual labourers. Her husband started working in a small eatery while she became a domestic worker.

COVID lockdown worsened the crisis

In 2020, India's COVID-19 lockdown resulted in a tremendous collapse of livelihoods, causing an epidemic that India has been trying to fight off for decades: hunger. Majhi's husband, like countless other marginalised folks, lost his job in May this year while a devastating second COVID wave was at its peak. While 50 percent of the households in rural India were forced to reduce the number of meals ever since the lockdown was imposed as part of an immediate adjustment for food security, about 68 percent of the households reduced the number of items in their meals, according to a study by the People's Archive of Rural India. Nisha, 30, who goes by her first name only, tells a similar story as her anaemia worsened in the last two years. "I could not go to a doctor in the last few months even though I have an unbearable pain in my ribs - because I have no money. Only social workers have gotten us some help, we did not get any other ration," she told Al Jazeera.

Nisha is a Dalit, a marginalised community that falls at the bottom of India's complex caste hierarchy. She lives in a slum in New Delhi's Shahdara area and works as a rag-picker. She recounts picking up at least one bag of biomedical waste every day during the peak of the COVID second wave. On most days, she has crushing headaches, rib pain and fatigue that do not allow her to work. Yet she must work to support her children's education.

'What to do with just rice?'

Having to go back to unsafe work environments is a story many Dalit and Adivasi (tribal) women share. The State of Working in India 2021 report shows that 83 percent of women lost their jobs during the corona virus pandemic, with 47 percent women and just 7 percent men unlikely to recover from the job loss. Beena Pallical from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights says most marginalised women were pushed back into work that put them in unsafe spaces and made them susceptible to catch the virus. But they had to do the work because the system works against them, she said. "Dalit and Adivasi women die younger than dominant-caste women and nutrition and health have always been a struggle for Dalit-Adivasi women. You throw in the livelihood crisis and the hunger crisis during the pandemic and the effects suffered by marginalised women would be manifold," she told Al Jazeera. Studies show 56 percent Dalit and 59 percent tribal women are anaemic, while the national average is 53 percent. In 2016, India ranked 170 out of 180 countries where women suffer from anaemia. Dalit women die 15 years younger than the dominant-caste women, a United Nations study says.

Dishanti Majhi, 25, is from Khaliyamunda, a tribal village in Odisha state's Kalahandi district. Dishanti, like many others in her village, is heavily dependent on forest produce. She would work in the fields and sell leaves of siali, a creeper with large leaves used to make plates. The government relief packages she got had only rice and flour, with nothing to supplement nutrition. "I used to have rice and vegetables after I sold forest produce and siali leaves at the local market. That is closed now and I don't have any way to make money or to buy produce. We are not getting any work as well. The government is only giving rice as relief, but what to do

with just rice?" asked Dishanti. "My children are at home and my husband is also out of the job. I work so much more now, at home and at forests when I can, but I am simply unable to eat like I used to two years back. I have gone to sleep hungry on many days and on most days, I only have one meal so my husband and children can have more meals," she added.

Women eat last as well as the least

Rajendran Narayan of the Stranded Workers Action Network and Hunger Watch says job losses have been disproportionate for women even in the informal sector. "The caregiving and domestic work have also increased back home for them. Workload for them has increased but pay has decreased. Within homes, women are the last to eat and have the least to eat. A hunger crisis at home means women will automatically have less to eat," he said, adding that the situation is particularly severe for pregnant and lactating women. "We are looking at a crisis that may not be clear now, but will have such long-term effects on public health and nutrition that we have to intervene now." The federal government declared relief initiatives in March last year to mitigate the effects of COVID. The free food grains distribution to ration card holders was deemed insufficient because only rice and lentils were included in 2020, while the latter has been excluded now. No such relief initiatives were announced during the second wave lockdown. In Chhattisgarh state's Kasdol, Kaushalya, a Dalit woman from a forest-dependent community, could not get access to mahua, harra and other leaves she used to sell. She said she was unable to make ends meet for her children. Marginalised women have not only struggled to access subsidised or free food grains, but also cash transfers by the government. "Many women I speak to claim they have been scared of catching the virus while going out to access banks for cash transfers, and many have not received their entitlements at all. Usually, there are conflicts with forest departments," Rajim Ketwas of the Dalit Adivasi Manch in Chhattisgarh told Al Jazeera. The rise in anaemia among pregnant women from the marginalised communities could also be attributed to the changes in cash transfers under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

"The NFSA demands that pregnant and lactating women must be given a cash transfer of 6,000 rupees [\$80] annually. The federal government subverted the NFSA and replaced it with Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana scheme that reduces the amount of this transfer to 5,000 [\$72]," said Narayan of the Stranded Workers Action Network and Hunger Watch. The government's budget for 2020-21 also drastically

reduced the amount allotted to the scheme by 48 percent. A study conducted in rural parts of Bihar state showed that 41 percent of households with pregnant or lactating women reported being unable to avail the ante- and post-natal checkups after the pandemic began. Lakshmi Devi Bhuiyan, a 60-year-old Dalit resident of Barwadih village in Jharkhand state's Latehar district, does not have any children to support her. She complains of constant headaches because of anaemia and other illnesses and looks weak. Bhuiyan and her husband were engaged in casual labour and do not own any land. Many elderly Dalit women have to continue intensive labour jobs well into their old age. "Our house is almost falling. We did not receive any money sanctioned by the Modi government - no elderly pension, no 500 rupees [\$7] support, nothing at all. We voted for him and look at us now," she told Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera reached out to the federal ministry of women and child development several times for a comment, but they did not respond.

'Harmful notions about vegetarianism'

Sylvia Karpagam, public health researcher and doctor based in the southern state of Karnataka, explains how a lack of nutrition has an intergenerational effect on women, especially those from the marginalised communities. "When a young woman from a marginalised community gets pregnant, she is already malnourished because of her caste, class and gender disadvantages. The child is also bound to be undernourished even before she reaches the age of one. This continues well into adolescence," she told Al Jazeera. Karpagam says addressing the issue of caste is crucial to addressing malnutrition among the marginalised women. "Accessibility to nutrient-dense foods can be reduced for families from marginalised communities ... The fact is what the government is currently offering is inherently not enough for a person to access full nutrition. Eggs, meat, poultry, milk products are the first to go away from a person's diet when they lose access to money and these should be the government's priority in relief," she told Al Jazeera. "Instead, the system continually propagates unscientific, harmful notions about vegetarianism, enforcing a dominant-caste, upper-class binary view on the issue of nutrition and health."

Meanwhile, Ranjita's troubles are far from over.

"I am afraid I won't be able to keep my older child alive too. My husband and I don't have any money to feed the family any more. What will my other child do? God only knows."

Source: Al Jazeera



Nepal human rights history: Here are 6 key movements

Globally, December 10 is observed as the Human Rights Day every year after the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on this day in 1948. This day is celebrated to promote equality, peace, justice, freedom and the work for the protection of human dignity irrespective of their race, colour, religion, sex, language or social status.

But, every now and then, human rights have been violated and to restore them, people have staged arduous protests and several human rights movements. In the context of Nepal as well, many such protests and human rights movements have been conducted. Here are some key human rights movements in the history of Nepal that have established and redefined human rights status in the country.

1. The 1979 Nepali Student Revolution

The Nepali Student Revolution of 1979 or 2036 Saalko Aandolan as it is known in the vernacular, was a series of protests made by the students in April and May of that year. Official records state that 11 people were killed and 164 were left wounded during the series of protests, one of the earliest human rights movements seen in Nepal.

On April 6, 1979, a group of students had protested against the execution of the former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. A huge violent clash started, and later the representatives of the student community composed a list of 22 demands to the authorities as a precondition to ending the student movement. Further protests were held alongside, and on April 9, a nine-member Students Action Committee was formed to write the 25-point charter of demands. Also, the Chief Action Committee comprising three members was formed. Then, on April 23, a protest was held against the violence committed by the Rashtravadi Swatantra Vidyarthi Mandal and the violent assault led to the death of a few students whereas over 60 others were injured. After the event, the authorities decided to close the campuses and hostel students were given 24 hours to clear the hostels. Later, clashes occurred in 37 of the then 75 districts of Nepal. Then education minister Pashupati Shamsheer Rana also resigned.


Then, on May 2, King Birendra formed a five-member commission headed by the Supreme Court Chief Justice Dhanendra Bahadur Singh to respond to the protest. Then, the 160 arrested students were also released. Later, the remaining 64 with the opposition political leaders were also released on May 9. Similarly, all the student committees of the student movement reached an agreement with the royal commission. The agreement included the abolition of the 1972 Education Policy, scrapping entrance exams of universities, giving the right to form independent unions, some of the key human rights for the students then.

2. People's Movement I

The People Movement I is also known as the 1990 people's movement or the Jana Andolan of 2046. It was a multiparty movement that started and ended in 1990, and put a full stop to absolute monarchy and commenced the governance system of multiparty democracy with constitutional monarchy. Besides politics, the movement also contributed to the country's human rights sector.

On December 15, 1960, King Mahendra had suspended the constitution, dissolved the elected parliament, dismissed the cabinet, imposed direct rule and imprisoned the then prime minister BP Koirala and his colleagues. It was the beginning of the partyless Panchayat system which deprived the public of some basic human rights. All the political parties were banned and the local people were also not satisfied with the monotonous regime. People were, directly and indirectly, speaking against it and the communists also started an underground revolution. A series of events occurred against the Panchayat system like planting bombs in the king's car, raising local awareness, protests, fire in Singha Durbar, etc. After all this, the Panchayat government declared a referendum to be held in 1980, but 55 per cent of voters came in favour of the Panchayat system. Nonetheless, the election was believed to be unfair as all the powers were in the hand of the king.

After a series of protests and events against Panchayat, two political groups the United Left Front and Nepali Congress united together to launch a campaign to



achieve a multiparty democracy in Nepal. The movement officially started on February 18, 1990. The joint civil resistance launched by the united political parties was successful in overthrowing the Panchayat system, and the country became a multiparty democracy along with a constitutional monarchy. It is still one of the largest and more successful human rights movements in Nepal.

3. People's Movement II

The People's Movement II is also known as the Loktantra Andolan held in 2006, arguably the largest democratic and human rights movement in Nepal. The cause of the movement was the coup by King Gyanendra and the goals were to restore the parliament and abolish the monarchy. Thus, the revolution resulted in the restoration of parliament and later, in 2008, Nepal was declared the federal democratic republic.

Using the Nepal Constitution 1990, King Gyanendra had controlled the government as an absolute monarch in 2005. He had dissolved the parliament and sent them all home, powerless, triggering the biggest human rights movements in Nepal. Both communist and non-communist political forces broke out against the king's power grab. The Seven Party Alliance stood for the restoration of democracy in Nepal and on April 24, 2006, the king relented and they achieved their goal. The 2006 democratic movement in Nepal became successful in abolishing the monarchy and establishing a popularly elected government. The injuries and death tolls were stated to be even more than the first people's movement.

4. Guthi Bill Movement

Locals protest the controversial Guthi Bill in Kathmandu, on June 19, 2019. The Guthi Bill protest was arguably the biggest human rights movement since the People's Movement of 2006. The protest was held at Maitighar Mandala in the capital on June 19, 2019, by gathering thousands of members of Kathmandu valley, especially people belonging to the Newa community. In simple words, guthis are socio-economic trusts or institutions that fund their obligation from incomes of cultivated or leased land as assets. After the entry of the Guthi Bill in the National Assembly, protestors consistently hit the streets against it. The protestors believed it to be an attempt of the government to wipe out centuries-old customs and traditions and nationalise the guthi-owned land. So, through the protest, they were pressing the government to withdraw or revise the bill.

At that time, the Hashtag #StopGuthiBill was trending on Twitter and various Facebook groups were also

formed against the Guthi Bill. However, the government was defending the bill stating that it has been brought not to control the guthis and their functioning, but to regulate them. The protestors were attacked by the police with batons and water cannons at Maitighar Mandala. And at least six people were injured when police tried to disperse the crowd. Finally, the government withdrew the bill.

5. The Kalapani Discord

On November 2, 2019, India published a new map of the political boundaries of the country. But, it sparked a series of protests in Nepal as the map also included the disputed area of Kalapani, which Nepal claims to be its part. Then, when the news was caught by the local media, there started the Kalapani protest throughout the nation with the trending hashtag #backoffindia on Twitter. Also, Nepali protestors gathered in front of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. Likewise, the local people of both countries showed their aggression regarding this case through online posts, tweets, comments on social platforms, triggering one of the widespread online and offline human rights movements in Nepal's context. Then, on May 20, 2020, Nepal released a new map of its territory that expanded its claim to 335 square km area up to the Kuthi Yanktiriver, including Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura. This is also considered a human rights movement as most Nepalis associate it with the rights to nationality.

6. Dalit movements

According to the 2011 Nepal census, Dalits make up about 13.6 per cent of the total population of the country. From the beginning, the Dalits have been oppressed and marginalised in the worst forms for millenniums in the name of caste. Also termed as 'untouchables' by the rigid caste system, the most critical issue for the community is to remove caste-based discrimination from the whole society and have a dignified life. Following this, the Dalit communities have faced many human rights violations and the member of the communities had to pour out to the streets in several instances.

So, numerous Dalit movements are observed in Nepal with the appeal to establish a just and equitable society where all persons can live without any fear respectfully. The first Dalit movement was considered as the successful movement of the Pashupati Temple Entrance Campaign in 1954. Similarly, the Dalit movements are held every year with the protestors holding placards raising public awareness for social equality and against caste-based discrimination.

Source: Online Akhbar

Farmers are free now: Women celebrate repeal of laws - and their own role in the protest



The Wire first met with Gurpreet Kaur Baras, a woman in her 30s, in December 2020. At the time, she was one of the leaders organising sit-ins in her village Baras, near Patiala. She was giving fiery sound bites to local media channels and leading all the sloganeering. “The Narendra Modi regime will have to repeal the laws”, she told one media channel. “Those who have died at the borders of Delhi are our martyrs, their martyrdom won’t be forgotten”, she told The Wire. After almost a year, her words have come true. Speaking to The Wire over the phone hours after Prime Minister Modi’s address to the nation on 19th November when he announced that the farm laws would be withdrawn, she spoke with the same thrill in her voice. This time she’s not angry but cheerful.

“The mood in my village is electric. This announcement has come on an auspicious day (Guru Nanak Jayanti). As soon as our local gurudwara announced that the farm laws will be withdrawn, congratulations have been pouring in. I’m taking calls one after the other.” It’s the perseverance and sheer sincerity of common people like Gurpreet to continue the protest by managing crowds, managing the media, taking turns to go to the Delhi border and rallying support for the movement that has proved fruitful today. But Gurpreet doesn’t want to take any credit. “I haven’t achieved this alone. People have sacrificed over a year of their life for this movement and it is everyone’s win,” she said.

Around 100 kilometres away, near Bathinda, Harinder Kaur Bindu, a senior leader of the BKU (Ekta-Ugrahan) was preparing for her meeting with women protestors in the area, where they were supposed to plan their next big move to Delhi on November 25. On her way to the meeting, she received a phone call regarding the prime minister’s announcement. “Of course, this is a huge victory,” she exclaimed over the phone.

She also congratulated a few media houses who she thinks helped their cause. “I really want to say that some media houses helped us immensely while the others were vilifying us. I don’t want to talk about them. We garnered so much support because the Punjabi media and some media houses in Delhi were fair to us,” she said. Harinder Kaur says she is proud of every woman who stood her ground and protested, come rain or

shine. “The fact that some of these women have not had proper education or are burdened by household chores, but managed to sit through this protest and fight for justice to the farming community says a lot. I congratulate each one of them”, she said.

“Today, I’m reminded of women from history who stood their ground in the freedom struggle, in the Ghadari struggle. We are proud daughters of all of them,” she added. Representing the young and the farmer-worker unity in this movement, Nodeep Kaur reached Singhu border as soon as she heard the news about the repeal. Nodeep is one of the many activists, scholars and protestors incarcerated for taking part in the movement. “I’m happy this announcement has been made. This will be crucial for farmer-worker unity going ahead,” she said. “But I want to say that along with this, the prime minister must also recognise the deaths - or state sponsored murders if we can call them - of the more than 700 people we have lost in this movement,” she added. “In addition, do the FIRs slapped on me and many others even make sense now? They should be taken back too.” Back in Bahadurgarh Jandia village in Punjab, 80-year-old Mohinder Kaur recalls the comments made about her by actress Kanaga Ranaut to vilify her and the farmers’ movement.

In the early days of the protest, Kaur had become the face of the movement. A photograph of her carrying the BKU Ekta-Ugrahan flag and marching in protest of the three farm laws had gone viral. Speaking to The Wire she said, “The farmers are free now. I want to congratulate the government also, they are also free now.” “Guru Nanak has always taught us to fight for the right thing. That’s what we have been doing and we’re grateful for this outcome today,” she added. “I come from a land of martyrs who have always fought for freedom. We are doing the same, fighting for ours.” “We are born in the land of freedom fighters and Gurus - Kartar Sarabha, Uddham Singh and Bhagat Singh. They freed our country and its people. These people will never be forgotten. Their teachings will have and will drive us forward,” she said. For now, these women are happy and celebrating but are aware that the fight for justice is not over just yet.

Source: The Wire

Pakistan sets up first-ever body of Hindu leaders to take care of minority community's temples



Pakistan on December 29 announced that it has set up a first-ever body of Hindu leaders to take care of the minority community's temples in the Muslim-majority country. The Ministry of Religious Affairs constituted the Pakistan Hindu Mandir Management Committee on the pattern of the already working Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee.

According to an official statement, the inaugural meeting of the Pakistan Hindu Temple Management Committee was chaired by Minister for Religious Affairs Pir Noor-ul-Haq Qadri. Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) Chairman Asif Hashmi briefed the meeting on the matters. The ETPB is a statutory board that manages religious properties and shrines of Hindus and Sikhs who had migrated to India following the partition.

"The committee will look after matters related to Hindu places of worship," Mr. Qadri said.

The committee comprising Dewan Chand Chawla, Haroon Sarab Dayal, Mohandas, Naranjan Kumar, Megha Arora, Amit Shadani, Ashok Kumar, Versi Mill Dewani and Amar Nath Randhawa will be headed by Krishna Sharma. "Pakistan has created history by constituting the committee on the demand of the Hindu community," Mr. Sharma said. Mr. Qadri said that the problems of non-Muslim population of Pakistan are being solved on priority basis and the formation of the committee will be instrumental in resolving the issues of the Pakistani Hindu community.

The minister went on to say that despite religious and cultural diversity, tolerance and acceptance of each other is humanity, adding that evil elements want confrontation in Pakistan on the basis of religion, sect and linguistics. "The new committee will act as a bridge between the non-Muslim population and the State," he said. He said that according to the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan, efforts were being made for the welfare of the non-Muslim population.



Hindus form the biggest minority community in Pakistan. According to official estimates, 75 lakh Hindus live in the country. The majority of Pakistan's Hindu population is settled in Sindh province where they share culture, traditions and language with Muslim residents.

Source: The Hindu

Global forum addresses the caste and sanitation work nexus



The links between caste and hazardous forms of sanitation work were highlighted by speakers at the Sanitation Workers Forum 2021 from 29 November - 2 December. Participants at the forum urged that immediate steps are taken to ensure the safety and dignity of millions of sanitation workers worldwide - and ensure social protections.

Manual scavenging - workers burning their baskets in protest

Joining together for a four-day virtual event, organizers, speakers and participants engaged to close knowledge gaps about sanitation work, devise effective interventions and implement health and safety practices. The first keynote speaker, Bezwada Wilson, a founder of Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) in India, discussed the linkages between caste and manual scavenging and stressed the need for manual scavengers' voices to be heard. He urged participants to show not only the dark and depressing side of sanitation work but to elevate the 'positive and personal voices' of the workers themselves. Dalit representation is essential. He also discussed how we bring together a global community to address the rights of sanitation workers.

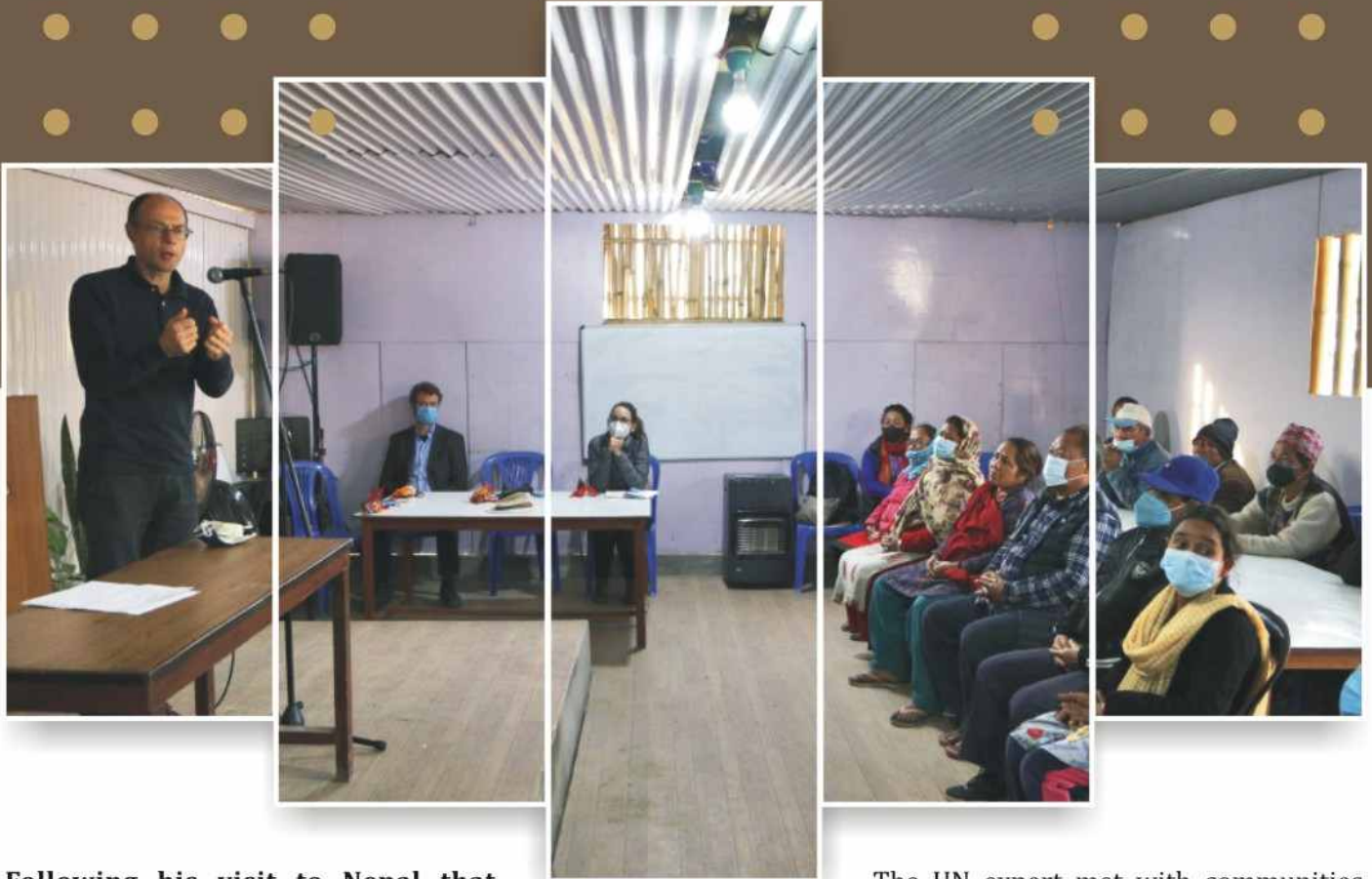
The second keynote session was delivered by Mary James Gill, Head of the Center for Law and Justice in Pakistan and co-founder of the Sweepers are Superheroes movement, which aims to raise awareness of sewer and waste workers' dignity, safety and social protection. She discussed how the phenomenon of sanitation work is not as clearly caste-based in Pakistan but is still underpinned by caste. She also stressed the need for international solidarity for these workers in a country where their plight receives little to no attention. Other sessions discussed the intersectionality between caste and gender, deep dives into labour rights and best practices and how the sector has changed as a result of COVID-19. Almost every session was recorded, so if you would like to listen again, or listen for the first time you will be able to do so for three months through the Whova platform. You can also follow up with people who attended the event through in-app messages, e-business card requests and Community posts.

The living and working conditions of sanitation workers and manual scavengers are being taken up by more research, policy and best practice agendas. However, despite this recognition, dangerous and demeaning types of sanitation worker continue to be practiced. Sanitation workers and manual scavengers are frequently discriminated against, subject to social stigma, exposed to health risks and paid sporadically (if at all) - all with insufficient protective equipment. The forum, organized with support from partners such as Water Aid, ILO, SNV, World Bank, WHO, brought activists, researchers, labour unions, policy makers and institutions together to address these challenges and demand increased resources to promote decent work, alternative skill development and improved conditions.

The event with over 250 attendees and 69 speakers from India, Pakistan, Madagascar, Nepal, Kenya, Senegal, Burkina Faso, USA, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire and Bangladesh, was designed to share knowledge and good practices about sanitation workers globally; build a community of practice around the topic which puts sanitation workers representatives at the forefront, alongside activists, policymakers, practitioners, students and academics; and discuss and prioritize future areas of research, policy and practice.

Source: IDSN

Nepal: UN poverty expert says caste discrimination is “the single most important factor” explaining why Dalits are disproportionately affected by poverty



Following his visit to Nepal that started on 29 November, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, Olivier De Schutter, released a statement highlighting the persistent interconnections between caste and poverty in Nepal. The Rapporteur also raised issues of caste violence and the need to do more to ensure meaningful political representation of Dalit women in Nepal.

“Though banned, caste-based and ethnicity-based discrimination remain a reality in social life and it is a major factor explaining the perpetuation of poverty,” De Schutter commented in the press release issued.

“Land issues remain unresolved, despite the efforts to accelerate the rehabilitation of former bonded laborers and to ensure landless Dalit benefit from land redistribution.”

The UN expert met with communities who suffer from intersecting forms of deprivation. Many were from historically disadvantaged and discriminated groups including Dalits.

“The stark inequalities resulting from the deeply entrenched norms and values of the Nepali caste system continue to perpetuate disadvantage today,” De Schutter said.

IDSN welcomes the attention paid to this crucial human rights issue by Olivier De Schutter and the time he has taken to engage with Dalit human rights defenders, including many IDSN members and affiliates, on his visit to Nepal.

The Rapporteur also praised the Nepal Government over the many legislative measures taken to protect marginalised groups in the country, while calling for

enhanced implementation.

He has elaborated on the issues associated with caste in his end of mission statement - please see the caste-related passages of the statement here:

“Indeed, sporadic yet tragic outbursts of violence resulting from inter-caste marriages suggest that, while a mainstream narrative highlights social cohesion and harmony, resistance by dominant groups is strong when historical hierarchies are questioned. Although untouchability was declared illegal more than a decade ago, with the adoption of the 2011 Anti-Caste Discrimination and Untouchability Act, caste-based discrimination persists across the country, with lingering prejudices continuing to cause significant violence within Nepali society...

Dalit, who occupy the lowest varna of the caste system and constitute at least 13.6% of the total population, are particularly affected by such violence and discrimination. A report on the perception of harmful practices found that 97% of respondents considered that discrimination based on caste occurs in their community, with nearly half of respondents stating that Dalit would not be allowed into the house of non-Dalit in their communities. Moreover, more than half of Dalit respondents reported having experienced caste-based discrimination within the past year, which included being denied entry into the home of “higher-caste” families or being denied access to using communal water sources or village temples...

Discrimination is the single most important factor explaining why the Dalit are disproportionately affected by poverty: around 42% of Dalit live below the poverty line (43.6% of Hill Dalit and 38.2% of Terai Dalit), whereas the national poverty rate is 25.2%. While the immediate causes of this gap are limited employment opportunities due to occupation specialization preventing Dalits from accessing well-paid jobs, as well as lack of access to (quality) education and land that perpetuates poverty from one generation of Dalits to the next, the persistence of social discrimination is the overarching factor explaining this situation...

In order to implement the “inclusive principle,” a reservations policy has been put in place since 2007, providing that 45% of positions in the federal civil service should go to specific disadvantaged groups as now identified in the Constitution. This policy was effective to some extent: women’s representation in



civil service, for instance, increased from 11% in 2007 to more than 20% a decade later, a remarkable achievement in such a short period of time. However, progress was slower for other groups. Dalit representation in the civil service was below 1% prior to the introduction of the reservations policy, but it remained around 2% by 2018, which remains significantly below the aims set by the policy...

The directive order adopted on 1 August 2021 by a Supreme Court joint bench of Justices Bishwambhar Prasad Shrestha and Anand Mohan Bhattarai now presents the Government with a new challenge. The Justices essentially ruled that the reservation system should be focused on needs and not on ethnicity: socio-economic status rather than an individual’s caste or ethnic identity, the judgment states, should be considered when allocating reservations. The Court also ruled that an individual could only benefit once in a lifetime from the reservations system...

The proper answer to the judgment, in the view of the Special Rapporteur, is not to abandon the reservations policy and replace it by a system that focuses on socio-economic status only, but to improve it in three ways. First, intersectionality should be properly considered. In order to avoid, for instance, that all the positions set aside for Madhesi be captured by men, or that all positions set aside for women be captured by non-Dalit women, the reservations policy could take into account the intersection of caste, ethnicity, sex and disability - defining, for instance, the appropriate representation of Madhesi Dalit women with a disability among the reserved positions.”

Source: IDSN

In India, 5 out of 6 multidimensionally poor are from lower tribes or castes: UN report



UNITED NATIONS: Five out of six multidimensionally poor people in India are from lower tribes or castes, according to a new analysis on global multidimensional poverty released by the United Nations. The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative said this in its latest report on poverty.

"In India, five out of six multidimensionally poor people are from lower tribes or castes. The Scheduled Tribe group accounts for 9.4 per cent of the population and is the poorest, with 65 million of the 129 million people living in multidimensional poverty. They account for about one-sixth of all people living in multidimensional poverty in India," it said.

Following the Scheduled Tribe group is the Scheduled Caste group with 33.3 per cent -- 94 million of 283 million people -- living in multidimensional poverty. The report further said that 27.2 per cent of the Other Backward Class group- 160 million of 588 million people -- live in multidimensional poverty, "showing a lower incidence but a similar intensity compared with the Scheduled Caste group. "Overall, five out of six multidimensionally poor people in India live in households whose head is from a Scheduled Tribe, a Scheduled Caste or Other Backward Class," it said.

Among the 1.3 billion multidimensionally poor people studied globally, almost two-thirds- 836 million- live in households in which no female member has completed at least six years of schooling. This exclusion of women from education has far-reaching impacts on societies around the world. These 836 million people live mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa (363 million) and South Asia (350 million). Seven countries account for more than 500 million of them: India (227 million), Pakistan (71 million), Ethiopia (59 million), Nigeria (54 million), China (32 million), Bangladesh (30 million) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (27 million).

According to the report, the top five countries with the largest number of people living in multidimensional poverty are in India (2015/16) at 381 millions, Nigeria (2018): 93 million, Pakistan (2017/18): 83 million, Ethiopia (2019): 77 million, Democratic Republic of the Congo (2017/18): 56 million. "The findings in this report are a call to action for policymakers everywhere. Across the 5.9 billion people who live in the 109 countries studied, more than one in five -- 1.3 billion -- live in multidimensional poverty. "Half of global multidimensionally poor people are children. And although prepandemic multidimensional poverty levels were declining, the poorest countries lacked emergency social protections during the COVID-19 pandemic and could suffer the most," the report said.

It said that about 16 million multidimensionally poor men and children (0.3 per cent of the total population) live in households without a woman or girl age 10 or older. But nearly half of multidimensionally poor people who live with a woman or a girl -- 622 million -- live in households in which no one, regardless of gender, has completed six or more years of schooling. In India, close to 12 per cent of the population -- 162 million people -- live in female-headed households.

One in six multidimensionally poor people -- 207 million -- across 108 countries live in female-headed households. Nearly a quarter of them live in India and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Uganda are together home to another quarter. "The COVID-19 pandemic has eroded development progress around the world, and we are still grappling to understand its full impacts," says Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator. "This year's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) reminds us of the need for a complete picture of how people are being affected by poverty, who they are and where they live, if we are to build forward better from this crisis and design effective responses that leave no one behind," the UNDP Administrator added.

Source: Times of India



Dalits, Adivasis in India pushed out of higher education during Covid-19, new report finds out

India has witnessed a complete collapse of healthcare facilities during the pandemic. Amid the lockdown, schools remain closed even when cinema theaters are open. The loss of learning has impacted marginalized communities very differently, a report titled "Confronting the Pandemic: Response and Recovering for Dalit and Adivasi students" by National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) finds. The report explores the ramifications of Covid-19 not only as a public health crisis but also as a crisis of deep, endemic inequality.

Financial mobility

With better educational opportunities, Dalit and Adivasi students are able to reduce the gap between themselves and other socially advanced groups. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) data indicates lack of financial resources as one of the main reasons for less accessibility of Dalit and Adivasi children to access higher education or drop out.

Even before the pandemic, about 15% of students surveyed (1,551 in absolute terms) were doing part-

time work to either pay for their education or to contribute to household earnings. During the pandemic, however, 22% Dalit and 29% Adivasi students were forced to take up employment in addition to their courses, 48% of which took up manual labour. Besides their limited ability to pay fees and meet educational expenses, they struggle to access available scholarships. For many Dalit and Adivasi students, attaining the dream of higher education often comes with the condition of earning their livelihood. Covid-19 and the related lockdown has unleashed a vicious livelihood crisis for these students.

Online education

Online education conveniently ignores existing inequalities and discrimination that exist beyond this online mode, especially among girls, who are at greater risk of missing out on education. It will reinforce the prevailing social exclusion that Dalit and Adivasi students face.

Inequitable access to online classes is a dangerous trend, given that education is one of the tools for Dalit-

Adivasi students to escape the burdens they carry due to their socio-economic status. 74% of India's Dalit population resides in rural areas. As per National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data, only 24% of Indian households have internet access. While this is 42% in urban India, it is just 15% in rural India, becoming a deterrent for Dalit students to access digital education. 51% of surveyed students could not access online classes because they did not own a smartphone or a laptop, and were burdened, lagging behind due to this digital divide. 21% did not have access to a regular, stable internet connection in their villages. The main reasons to not access online classes were unavailability of Android phones, laptops, internet and space at home or engagement in a job to meet expenses.

Scholarships and other entitlements

An important lever to increase access to government entitlements is the budgetary allocation to higher education schemes, particularly Post Matric Scheme (PMS). Post Matric Scholarship is a massive scheme, covering about 62 lakh students across the country. In 2014-15, students belonging to SC had a share of 13.5% and STs 4.8%. By 2018-19, this had increased to 15% for SCs and 6% for STs. Despite growing demand from SC/ST beneficiaries across the country, the PMS has faced continuous budgetary cuts. The government has failed to address the issue to adequately allocate for the scheme and work towards its better implementation.

The NCDHR report found about 31% of the total surveyed students didn't receive a scholarship in the past year, with women constituting 47% of them. Out of the total surveyed students, 54% of them do not know whom to reach out in the government for information regarding Post Matric Scholarship and other government entitlements. 93% of the students didn't receive any information/updates about the entitlements/Post Matric Scholarship from the media, especially during the Covid-19 period. More than 56% of the students pay up to Rs 3000 as their accommodation (hostel, PG or rented place) and around 51% of students pay their monthly mess charges up to Rs3000., therefore the non-payment of PMS would risk them to vacate their premise or run into financial debt.

Intersectional narratives: Gender and Disability

Closing down of university spaces has blocked social mobility and resources for Dalit and Adivasi Women. Women's education automatically becomes a non-



priority amidst survival struggles and a lack of social security. The study revealed that 21% of women respondents were forced to take up employment during Covid-19. Another reason behind families discouraging online education for women students is exercising strong control over women's sexuality. Access to the digital space also opens up avenues for one to explore their sexuality in various ways. In a tightly monitored Brahminical culture of regulating women's sexuality, women's social mobility, be it in the physical space or digital, is bound to be put to scrutiny.

The report highlights that some immediate concerns that need to be addressed for the Dalit transgender community include legal recognition of caste identity within trans reservation; inclusion of Bahujan history in mainstream education; reservation in government hostels and accommodation for outstation candidates applying for admissions to universities. There is a near absence of Dalit and Adivasi students with disabilities, particularly in higher education. 26% of the total PWD students were forced to take up employment during Covid-19. 20% of the PWD students are planning to discontinue their study post Covid-19. 20% of the PWD students are planning to discontinue their study post Covid-19.

During such a critical period, state negligence and apathy towards Dalit and Adivasi students is evident, highlighting the exclusionary tendencies in our education system.

The report stresses that there is a strong need to re-evaluate the education system to address the existing inequalities and make it more inclusive as for thousands of Dalit and Adivasi students, education is the only means to break the vicious circle of economic deprivation and oppression.

Source: Two Circles

Hindu temple destroyed in northwest Pakistan rebuilt, opens doors to devotees



A century-old Hindu temple, which was vandalised and set on fire by an irate mob of radical Islamists in northwest Pakistan in December 2020 has been opened to devotees by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed who had ordered authorities to reconstruct it, according to a media report. In December 2020, century-old Shri Param Hans Ji Maharaj temple in Teri village in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district was vandalised and demolished by a mob led by some local clerics belonging to the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F).

Chief Justice Ahmed at the time ordered authorities to reconstruct the temple and instructed them to recover the money for the restoration work from the attackers whose act had caused "international embarrassment" to Pakistan. Chief Justice Ahmed attended a grand function at the rebuilt temple to celebrate Diwali festival and to express solidarity with the members of the Hindu community, the Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, Chief Justice Ahmed said that the Supreme Court of Pakistan has always taken steps to protect the rights of minorities and it would continue to do so in the future, the paper reported. According to the Constitution, the Hindus enjoy the same rights as people of other religions in Pakistan, he was quoted as saying by the paper. While assuring that the Supreme Court will ensure protection of religious freedom to the country's minority communities, he asserted that no one has the authority to destroy or harm a religious place of worship belonging to another community.

The community presented the Chief Justice with a turban and a digital Quran. He was invited to the event by the Pakistan Hindu Council, which also hosted pilgrims from Sindh and Balochistan provinces.

Pakistan Hindu Council patron-in-chief and member of the National Assembly Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

expressed gratitude to the measures taken by the Chief Justice and the Supreme Court, the report said. Kumar, a senior leader of the ruling Tehreek-e-Insaaf Party headed by Prime Minister Imran Khan, said that if similar steps are taken to inaugurate four other historic temples, it would help improve the country's image in the world, the report said.

The rebuilt shrine is associated with a saint, Shri Param Hans Ji Maharaj, in Karak district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where the temple was established in 1920. Last month, the apex court also ordered the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government to recover USD 1,94,161 from the culprits involved in vandalising the shrine. More than 100 people who were involved in the incident were arrested, as per the apex court directive.

In 1997, the shrine was first attacked and severely damaged, and Vankwani had approached the apex court in 2015 seeking help to restore the holy place and restart the annual pilgrimage. After the Supreme Court issued directives to the provincial government to restore and preserve the Teri temple, the Pakistan Hindu Council started holding the annual fair in 2015.

Since the temple is being managed by the local Hindu families, it comes administratively under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province government and not under the Evacuee Trust Property Board's control.

Hindus form the biggest minority community in Pakistan. According to official estimates, 75 lakh Hindus live in the country. The majority of Pakistan's Hindu population is settled in Sindh province where they share culture, traditions and language with Muslim residents. They often complain of harassment by the extremists.

Source: India today

Sanitation workers not in frontline COVID-19 fight - Research



A new research, conducted by WaterAid, an NGO, has found out that sanitation workers have been forgotten as frontline workers in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The research, carried out in South Asia, Burkina Faso and Nigeria, also found out that many of the sanitation workers in developing countries had been forgotten, underpaid, unprotected and left to fend for themselves during the COVID-19 period.

The NGO released the findings in their research ahead of this year's World Toilet Day, calling on government to improve the living conditions of sanitation workers as well as prioritising their safety and wellbeing.

In a statement issued on November 19, 2021, WaterAid said despite providing a vital service in ensuring that human waste was cleared, stored and disposed of safely, sanitation workers were often marginalised, stigmatised and shunned as a result of their job.

It added that many sanitation workers worked on the frontline of the pandemic, throughout national lockdowns, in hospitals and quarantine centres and in the heart of communities with poor access to safe water, decent sanitation and good hygiene facilities.

Hazardous conditions

The research also highlighted the hazardous working conditions, a dangerous lack of PPE, poor training and legal protection, as well as loss of income for millions of people who work as sanitation workers.

The research considered sanitation workers to include people who clean toilets and sewers, empty latrine pits and septic tanks and operate pumping stations and treatment plants as well as those who clear faecal waste manually, sweep rubbish and transport faecal sludge.

According to the research, many sanitation workers indicated that they were forced to go to work during lockdown even if they felt ill, for fear of losing their jobs.

"In India, 23 per cent of sanitation workers

interviewed had to work for longer hours during the pandemic, taking on an additional two to six hours per day while some hospital sanitation workers were even asked to work up to 30 hours continuously without additional payment," it indicated.

Vital role

The Chief Executive of WaterAid, Tim Wainwright, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vital role sanitation workers play in our communities but it has also revealed the vulnerability of this essential workforce that is often undervalued and overlooked. It's unacceptable that so many sanitation workers operate without the support and safeguards they need."

For him, "WASH services are critical to maintaining public health and will be fundamental to surviving and recovering from the pandemic, and future pandemics - but without sanitation workers, these services will not function. It's important we invest and support the workforce, not just for the sake of public health but also for the economy - to ensure universal access to decent sanitation and a better future for all."

For his part, Senior Policy Analyst at WaterAid, Dr Andrés Hueso González, noted that "It's vital governments, local authorities, employers and the general public take action to support sanitation workers so they can do their job safely, with the dignity and recognition they deserve."

In addition, he said : "These key workers should be protected through legislation, policies and guidelines that ensure workers have appropriate PPE, regular training, a decent wage and access to health insurance and social security."

For him, "Sanitation workers also need to be recognised, respected and supported by institutions and by individual citizens. We all have a role to play in tackling and removing the deep-rooted discrimination they have endured for far too long."

Source: Graphic