

Quarterly MINO-VIEW

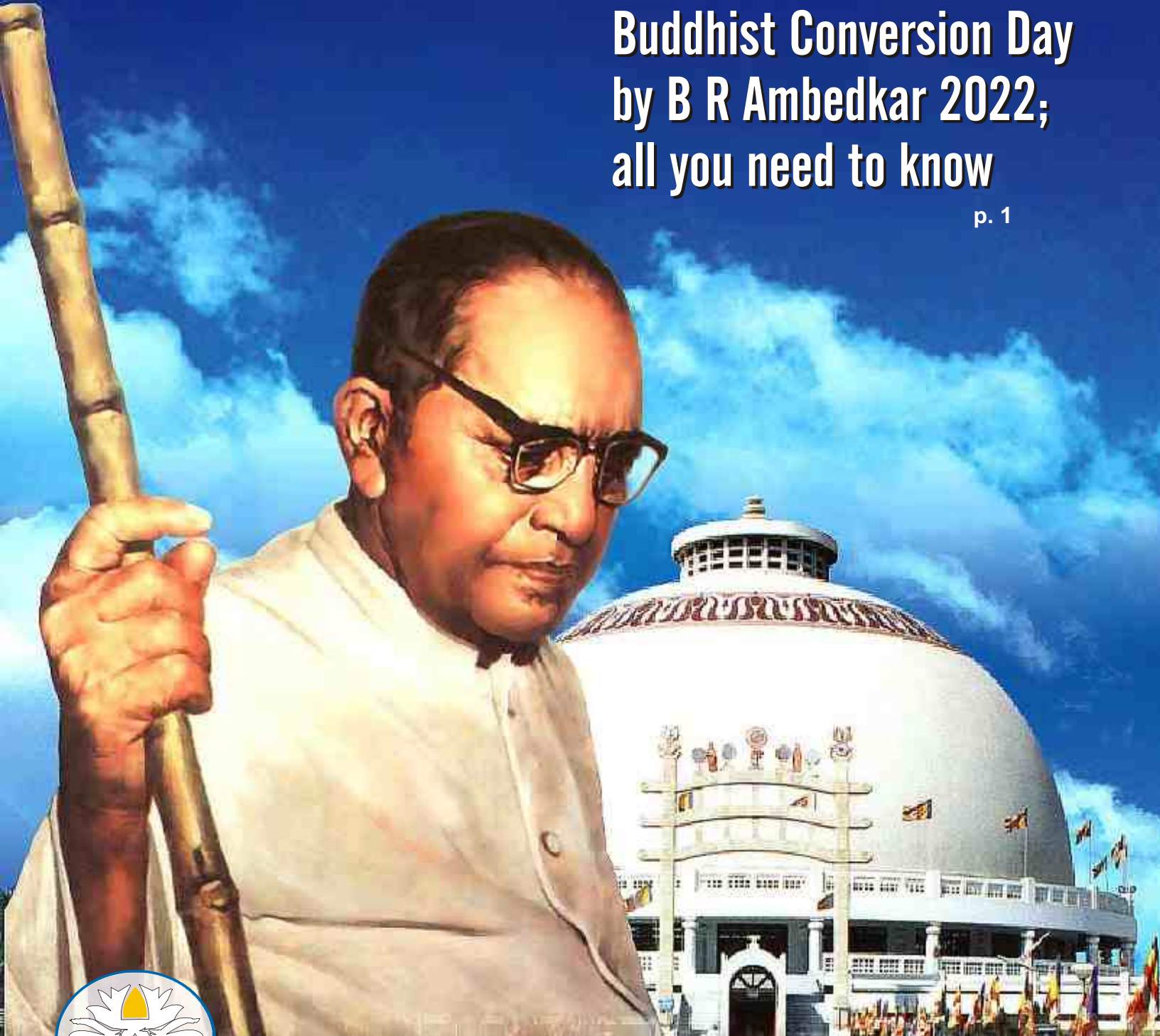
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Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies

Buddhist Conversion Day by B R Ambedkar 2022; all you need to know

p. 1



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



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

The role of media in today's advanced age cannot be denied. Media can be very helpful in highlighting social problems and efforts to solve them. But this is possible only when the media itself carries out its duties in an independent and responsible manner. Unfortunately, more or less all media houses around the world seem to be reporting biased under some political, social or societal pressure. In this regard, it is important to give equal representation to all sections of the society in the leading positions of media houses. South Asian countries are also under the influence of this phenomenon. According to a report published by Oxfam India recently, 90% of the top positions in the Indian media are occupied by people belonging to the so-called upper caste. The authors from marginalized castes only contribute to around 1 out of 5 articles published in Hindi and English newspapers while 3 to 4 articles are written by upper-caste authors. This unbalanced attitude in the media houses proves that the representation of these oppressed classes in other areas of life is also not equal. Rather, the marginalized classes and other minorities continue to face violence, atrocities and injustice, along with lack of representation. Voices of such unequal treatment are heard frequently across South Asia. On the caste-based incident of a Dalit youth recently from Bangladesh, Dalit organizations strongly demanded to end the unwritten restrictions imposed on the lower castes to enter the restaurants. Recently government of Nepal announced to give 9% reservation to Dalits and backward classes in politics and democratic process, but the so-called upper castes started a protest against this decision, insisted on giving equal rights to the backward classes due to which Dalits sacrificed their lives and are still facing inhumane treatment. These voices echoing around the world from South Asia have also influenced the western world. That is why Brown University of United States has also joined a number of colleges and universities by explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste. It's the first Ivy League institution to add such protections to its non-discrimination policy. Instead of suppressing these voices, which are emerging from South Asia and spreading throughout the world, there is a need to consider them. The United Nations and other human rights organizations have a responsibility to play their full role in creating a society based on equality.

Editor

Buddhist Conversion Day by B R Ambedkar 2022; all you need to know

After Ambedkar started practicing law, he became actively involved in Dalit rights; later and took various steps in the overall development of the Dalits.

Dr B R Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and one of India's most revered leaders, publicly converted to Buddhism, along with 3.65 lakh of his followers. He was converted in Nagpur, in a traditional ceremony. He was the pioneer of the Buddhist moment in India.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, also known as Babasaheb, was born on April 14, 1891, into a low-income Dalit family that experienced prejudice, since they belonged to a scheduled caste.

When Babasaheb started practising law in Mumbai, he became actively involved in Dalit rights; later, he took various steps in the social, economic and political development of the Dalits.

Here are some famous quotes by Babasaheb Ambedkar

“Though I was born an untouchable

Hindu, I shall not die as a Hindu,” he said in one of his speeches. “The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcasts as long as there are castes.”



“Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system.” “Democracy is more than just a form of government; it is fundamentally an attitude of respect and reverence for one's fellowmen.”

“Religion, social status and property are all sources of power and authority which one man has to control the liberty of another.” “Plato had no perception of the uniqueness of every individual, of his incommensurability with others, of each individual as forming a class of his own. He had no recognition of the infinite diversity of active tendencies and the combination of tendencies of which an individual is capable.”

According to this rule, rationalism, as a canon of interpreting the Vedas and Smritis, is absolutely condemned. It is regarded to be as wicked as atheism and the punishment provided for it is ex-communication.”

Courtesy: TFPJ



Discrimination against Women, Muslims and SCs-STs Rising: Oxfam



Sarah Thanawala

The Oxfam India Discrimination Report, in its 2022 edition, gives a detailed picture of the extent of identity-based discrimination in India by highlighting the gaps in access to employment and in wages, credit and health facilities. The report conducts this analysis across different castes, tribal and religious identities and gender. The analysis further covers different types of jobs, that is, regular, casual and self-employment.

Three alternate empirical approaches or the 'decomposition method', have been used to study inequality and discrimination. These approaches include the non-parametric measures that are employed to disaggregate standard measures of inequality and parametric measures that are used to directly identify the components, attributable to the different socio-religious factors of discrimination. Explanation through endowments is the third approach of the decomposition method that refers to attributes of physical assets, education, skills, experience and other qualifications of the individuals.

Gender-based discrimination

Discrimination on the basis of gender is 'almost total' in the country, the report alarmingly points out. It highlights that patriarchy makes a large segment of women, with the same or even higher qualifications as compared to men, stay outside employment. This has shown no improvement over time, the report noted. According to the report, gender discrimination in India is 'structural', resulting in huge disparities between the earnings of men and women under normal circumstances. The report goes on to point out that in both rural and urban areas, the earning gaps range between 50 to 70 per cent for casual workers and 20 to 60 per cent for regular workers.

"Gender-based discrimination is the reason for 98% of the employment gap between salaried males and females in urban areas", the report finds. In 2019-20, 95 per cent of the gap in earnings between men and women engaged in casual work was on account of discrimination.

"Self employed males earn 2.5 times more than females,

83% of which is attributed to gender-based discrimination", the analysis of the report laid down. In the self-employment category, on an average, men earn Rs. 15,996 as compared to women, who earn merely Rs. 6,626. In rural areas, the average earnings of self-employed men are Rs. 9,348 as compared to a mere Rs. 4,383 for women. 93 per cent of this gap in earnings is attributable to discrimination and just seven per cent is due to the endowment gap.

Religion and caste-based discrimination

The report mentions the low and declining, albeit existing, discrimination against Muslims in access to employment. However, it emphasizes that one of the factors for low level of discrimination against Muslims is due to their lack of participation in the workforce. Their low level of earnings corresponds to the low levels of their endowments in terms of educational degrees and formal years of schooling, among other reasons.

"In 2019-20, 68% of difference between Muslim and Non-Muslim engaged as salaried workers in urban areas was due to discrimination", the report stated. "As per the [Periodic Labour Force Survey] 2019-20, the average earning of non-Muslims in urban areas in [regular employment] is INR 20,346 which is significantly higher than that of Muslims, which is INR 13,672", the report highlighted.

Regarding caste-based discrimination, particularly against Scheduled Castes ('SC') and Scheduled Tribes ('ST'), the report states, "[Periodic Labour Force Survey] data for the year 2019-20 shows that the mean income for SC/ST persons is INR 15,312 against INR 20,346 for persons belonging to general category". In case of self-employment, the average earning of non-SC/ST workers is Rs. 15,878 and for SC/ST it is Rs. 10,533. In its findings, the report noted that the subsistence of the gap in earning and employment indicates an increase in identity-based discrimination against the SC/ST population and women, since the educational endowment of the communities had improved over time.

(Sarah Thanawala is a staff writer at The Leaflet. Courtesy: The Leaflet.)

US govt 'ignoring' persecution of minorities in India: USCIRF CHIEF AT CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING

A top US official has slammed the Biden administration for failing to formally designate India as one of the world's worst religious freedom offenders over the country's appalling record of violations against religious minorities.

The State Department's decision to exclude India from its gallery of global religious freedom offenders was a “baldfaced political manoeuvre” and “shameful”, said Commissioner David Curry of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) during a Congressional Briefing on Capitol Hill. He also added that Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the US State Department “did not honour the law” in its refusal to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern, despite the fact that India “clearly” qualifies as such.

“I cannot tell you how frustrated I and all of us at USCIRF, are that the State Department did not take our recommendation to designate India as a CPC,” said Curry. “India clearly meets the threshold of a CPC as set out in the International Religious Freedom Act... This was a baldfaced political manoeuvre to ignore what's happening in India. That's why it's so shameful.”

On November 22, USCIRF released a Country Update report on India, expressing concerns over rise in religious freedom violations and reiterating its recommendation that the State Department designate India as a CPC. Shortly after, Secretary Blinken and the State Department released the official CPC list for 2022, failing to include India despite multiple warnings from USCIRF.

“We reminded the State Department... [that] when the standards of the law are clearly met, they must designate the country as a CPC. They cannot waive action on the designation. They can only waive action once the designation is made and that can only be done based on the

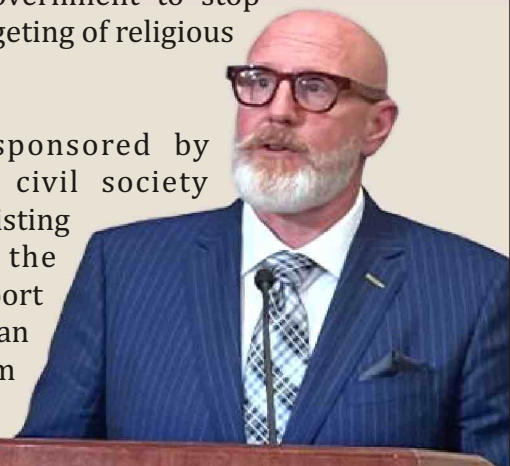
important national interests of the United States,” said Curry.

Curry said, he saw “double standard” apparent in the State Department's willingness to list other US allies, including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, as CPCs while India is consistently left off the list.

“We have to keep it real that [the Indian government] is spending a lot of money here, they're spending a lot of time demonizing anybody who speaks out on these subjects. And there's a ripple effect of fear amongst the political class,” he told a crowd of people including congressional staffers, other government officials and members of the civil society.

Adding that speaking against Hindu extremism is “not a denigration of Indian culture,” Curry said, “We understand the values and the cultural importance of the Indian people, but this point is not separate from that. It has to be addressed. We need the Indian government to stop encouraging the targeting of religious minorities.”

The briefing, cosponsored by several US-based civil society groups, mostly consisting of diaspora was the release of a new report prepared by the Indian American Muslim



“David Curry expressed deep frustration with US govt failing to designate India as Country of Particular Concern”.



Council (IAMC), “Genocide Convention and the Persecution of Muslims in India.”

Moderating the briefing was Nadine Maenza, who served as USCIRF's Vice Chair from 2018-2020 and Chair from 2020-2022, said, the State Department's decision to not include India on its list of CPCs for this year, “is disappointing and frankly unacceptable, on many counts.”

“I cannot emphasize enough how far past time it is for officials in the State Department and the US government as a whole to stop skirting around the issue of Muslim persecution in India. India is our ally and just as importantly, it is the world's largest democracy. And the systematic persecution of 200 million religious minorities in a democracy is simply unacceptable,” she said.

Dr Gregory Stanton, founder of the global watchdog organization Genocide Watch, spoke on “the very worrying signs of genocide underway in India,” calling on the US government to be vocal in condemning the actions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“We need to make very clear to Modi that he's not going to get away with this kind of persecution of Muslims,” he said.

Speaking specifically on the “authoritarian crackdown” on Muslim-majority Kashmir, DrAther Zia, an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Northern Colorado, stated that “widespread xenophobia and Islamophobia, fueled by Hindu supremacy and ethnonationalism,” are at the heart of human rights abuses in the region.

“Kashmiris exist in a state of siege, caught amidst a

dense web of Indian soldiers, checkpoints, barbed wires, bunkers, military convoys, trucks, drones, armored vehicles, garrisons, secret prisons, jails and military bases,” said Zia.

“The State Department can and should designate Indian officials, like Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who have committed religious freedom violations as Individuals of Particular Concern, effectively banning these individuals from entering or conducting business in the United States,” said Sunita Viswanath, Co-Founder of Hindus for Human Rights.

“December 9th is the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide,” said Rasheed Ahmed, Executive Director of IAMC. “If there's one thing the world should have learned from the Holocaust, it is that silence is complicity. That is why it's of the utmost importance that Secretary Blinken and the State Department listen to the victims and designate India as a CPC in 2023.”

Organisers of the briefing consisted of Genocide Watch, World Without Genocide, Indian American Muslim Council, Hindus for Human Rights, International Christian Concern, Jubilee Campaign, 21Wilberforce, Dalit Solidarity Forum, New York State Council of Churches, Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America, India Civil Watch International, International Commission for Dalit Rights, Center for Pluralism, American Muslim Institution, Students Against Hindutva Ideology, International Society for Peace and Justice, The Humanism Project and Association of Indian Muslims of America.

Courtesy: Counter View

Demand to end caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh



A rights body in Bangladesh has called for lifting the unwritten 'ban' on the entry of Dalits - the lowest outside the four main castes in the Indian subcontinent's social order- into restaurants and eateries after a youth burnt his hand in a scuffle over the issue.

The Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) made the demand during a press conference held at the Bogra Press Club on Dec. 17 days after Mithun Bashfor, 23, suffered burn injuries at a local hotel in the Santahar municipal area of the northern Bogra district.

The next day, on Dec. 18, police arrested Masud Rana, 33, a Muslim youth for allegedly pushing Bashfor and causing him to fall on boiling oil, after a heated argument over serving him inside the restaurant.

“This age-old rule, this racist treatment of a specific class of people who are in a minority is a violation of human rights. All citizens of an independent country have equal rights. The ban on Dalit communities in hotels is a punishable offense,” Bibhutoh Roy, the central president of BDERM, told UCA News.

Bangladesh has approximately 5.5 million Dalits or former untouchables who suffer multiple forms of discrimination including social, political and economic exclusion, according to the BDERM.

Roy demanded stringent punishment for those guilty of refusing to admit Bashfor inside the restaurant and attacking him for defying their diktat.

Rezaul Karim, the officer-in-charge of Adamdighi police station, said Rana was arrested and

presented before a court.

Sirajul Islam Khan, chairman of the Adamdighi sub-district, told UCA News that they have imposed a fine of 10,000 taka (US\$940) on the hotel owner and it will be utilized for the treatment of the victim.

Though against the law, Dalits and other discriminated communities in Bangladesh are regularly prohibited from entering restaurants and other eateries or touching plates and glasses. They are forced to buy packed food and eat outside.

Any resistance or protest against the discriminatory practice leads to violence, as in the case of Bashfor.

The caste system is regarded as a Hindu tradition originating in India but does affect people across religious and national boundaries across the sub-continent.

The Bangladesh National Parliament introduced an Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022 in its last session and it is currently under review by the Parliamentary Committee on Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs.

Holy Cross Father Liton Hubert Gomes, secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Justice and Peace Commission, said that caste discrimination cannot be changed by legislation alone and requires better social education and awareness.

“So, besides the law, emphasis should also be placed on enhancing social values,” he told UCA News.

Source: UCA NEWS

The report states that 3 out of 5 articles published in Hindi and English newspapers are written by General caste authors.

New Delhi: About 90% of higher positions in the Indian Media are occupied by the upper caste people. Not even a single Dalit or Adivasi heading Indian mainstream media, according to a new report.

The second edition of Oxfam India-Newslaundry's Report 'Who tells our stories matters: Representation of Marginalised Caste Groups in Indian Media' stated that 90% of leadership positions in Indian media houses are occupied by General caste groups with no Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) heading mainstream media outlets.

The report is released at The Media Rumble, South Asia's largest news media forum. The report states that 3 out of 5 articles published in Hindi and English newspapers are written by General caste authors. The report also stated that marginalized castes (SC, ST or OBC) authors only contribute to around 1 out of 5 articles.

Out of 121 newsrooms in 106 the leadership positions - editor-in-chief, managing editor, executive editor, bureau chief, input/output editor - across the newspapers, TV news channels, news websites and magazines under study - are occupied by upper caste people. Five out of 121 are occupied by other backward classes and six by people from minority communities. The case of four individuals could not be identified.

Out of a total of 40 anchors for Hindi stations and 47 for

Upper Caste Groups Hold 90% Of Leadership Roles In Indian Media: Reports



Ashmita Chhabria

websites are written by persons from the upper castes.

Amitabh Behar, CEO of Oxfam India said that Indian Media Houses continue to fail in creating an enabling environment for Dalits, Adivasis and Bahujans. He said, "Our second report in three years continues to show that newsrooms in India are not an inclusive place for marginalized communities in the country. The leaders of media organizations across all platforms continue to fail in creating an enabling environment for Dalits, Adivasis and Bahujans."

"The media in the country needs to uphold the constitutional principle of equality in not just its coverage but also in its hiring practices," he added. The study looked at the coverage, socioeconomic background of the leadership and caste makeup of the journalists working for the organizations at 43 Indian print, TV and digital media sources.

English channels, three out of every four discussion anchors are upper caste. None of them were Dalits, Adivasis or members of the OBC. "The majority of the panelists for news stations' primetime discussion programs-more than 70% of them-come from the upper castes. Only 5% of all articles in English-language newspapers are written by Adivasis and Dalits. Hindi newspapers perform marginally better, at roughly 10%," It read.

Only 10 of the 972 pieces featured on the cover pages of the 12 magazines under examination are about caste-related concerns, according to the analysis. Around 72% of articles with author names on news

Courtesy: HW News


Pakistan On Its Way to Promote Interfaith Harmony

Quratulain Hafeez

People from various cultural, racial and religious backgrounds live in Pakistan. 96.28 percent of the country consists of a Muslim population. Minority groups make up 4% of the population, with Christians at 1.59%, Hindus at 1.60% and Ismaili and Qadianis make 0.22 %. Unluckily this diversity is now being mistreated. Whether it is the ongoing violence against non-Muslims or the sectarian violence among Muslims across the nation, these misperceptions about other religions are a major contributor to violence among religious communities. Unfortunately, Pakistan has fallen prey to these social ills.

The government of Pakistan has contributed significantly by carrying out numerous initiatives and plans to guarantee all of Pakistani society with various religious and ethnic backgrounds the opportunity to socialize with one another. The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan specifically mentioned the rights of minorities to preserve interreligious harmony. To represent religious minorities' voices Article 51 (2A) of the Constitution grants ten additional public services to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Parsi religious communities in the national assembly. The Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan mandated the establishment of a National Council for Minorities. The prime objective of the Council is to oversee, the effective application and protection of rights guaranteed to minorities by the Pakistani Constitution. The Council also demands from the Federal and Provincial Governments to structure the policy proposals to uphold and defend the rights of minorities as per the 2014 Jurisdiction of SC.

Since the last decade Pakistan has been working



on the issues of protection of religious minority's rights however, the process speeded up in 2018. The Ministry of Human Rights created the Action Plan against Religious Persecution in 2016. The election campaign of the political Party "Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf" introduced, in their manifesto to establish a "legally empowered, well-resourced, independent National Commission on Minorities, followed by provincial Commissions/ Departments". The strategy outlines a strenuous effort to be undertaken with numerous stakeholders to protect and advance religious minorities so that they are better able to contribute to the peace and development of the nation and become a part of Pakistan's mainstream social fabric fearlessly. It constitutes a task force at the federal level for developing a strategy for promoting religious tolerance. Curb hate speech in social media. The creation of an endowment fund for student scholarships, development of a complaint/redress mechanism, review/proposal of amendments for discriminatory laws and protection of places of worship are just a few of the initiatives mentioned in the Action Plan. Others include raising awareness and providing training on interfaith



harmony, reviewing and revising education curricula at all levels to foster a peaceful and inclusive society and raising funds for student scholarships. Subsequently, it is pertinent to mention here that religious harmony is crucial for maintaining interreligious relations. For this purpose, On January 16, 2018, a National Narrative (Paigham e Pakistan) for Peaceful and Moderate Pakistani Society based on Islamic Principles was presented under the watchful eye of government officials. In January 2019, the Paigham-e-Pakistan Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies released a fatwa (verdict) signed by over 1800 Pakistani religious scholars denouncing suicide bombings, armed uprisings and other acts of terrorism committed in the name of Sharia.

One of the main issues facing minorities, which is being echoed around the world, is the forced conversion of young girls. The Hindu Marriage Act of 2017 was passed by the National Assembly in response to this challenge, covering all of Pakistan except Sindh. To make it easier for the Hindu community to get married under the Sindh Hindu marriage Rules, 2019, the Sindh government passed the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act 2016 (amended in 2018). Additionally, to resolve the



issue and dispel any negative perceptions about forced conversion, the Pakistan Hindu Council and Ulema confined an agreement. According to this agreement, the law approved by the Parliament will be adopted regarding conversion. Any Hindu who approaches ulema for conversion will be reported to the local Hindu community leader, to meet with their parents (in absence of Ulema), until the law is approved. Still, if he/she wishes to convert will be allowed to do so. The Pakistani religious and political elite have used religious segregation by emphasizing “divide and rule” and discouraging the idea of “unity in diversity to effectively consolidate their power. Segregation based on religion has become a major tool for encouraging violence against non-Muslims. This encourages extremism by instilling the desire in jihadist groups to commit acts of religious terrorism against members of other faiths. It is therefore essential to oppose any misuse of religion. Likewise, we must guard against religious fanaticism and extremism to promote interfaith harmony. Under the guise of religion, encourage hatred or even terrorist acts are destructive and poses a serious threat to the peace and prosperity of Pakistan.

Source: Modern Diplomacy

Is caste a problem for America's South Asian diaspora? Yes, says a Dalit rights activist's book

An excerpt from 'The Trauma of Caste: A Dalit Feminist Meditation on Survivorship, Healing and Abolition'.

Thenmozhi Soundararajan



I think my mom never expected to have to have The Talk in America. My parents' generation was so naive. They thought they had left caste behind when they came to the United States. They were steeped in a desperate optimism, being among the first generation to benefit from affirmative action programs that enabled Dalits to access higher education and pursue professions abroad as part of a new wave of South Asian immigrants to the US in the 1970s.

After all they had endured to become educated, my parents genuinely believed caste was in the rearview mirror; in truth, they also needed to push down the demons that had terrorised them at home. When I asked my mom about our caste, however, she recognised that we had not left it behind. And that perhaps the demons of caste could never be escaped. Moreover, leaving the material and economic conditions of caste doesn't mean you have healed from the trauma of caste. And importantly it's not just trauma from the past: Everywhere South Asians go, they bring caste and trauma from caste apartheid. Caste migrates and spreads, reestablishing itself in our new geographies as we arrive as settler colonials. Caste is embodied by all diasporic South Asians, regardless of our ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, sexual or political

affiliations. Although caste discrimination and caste-based violence in the United States are not as widespread and overt as in South Asia, they exist here as well.

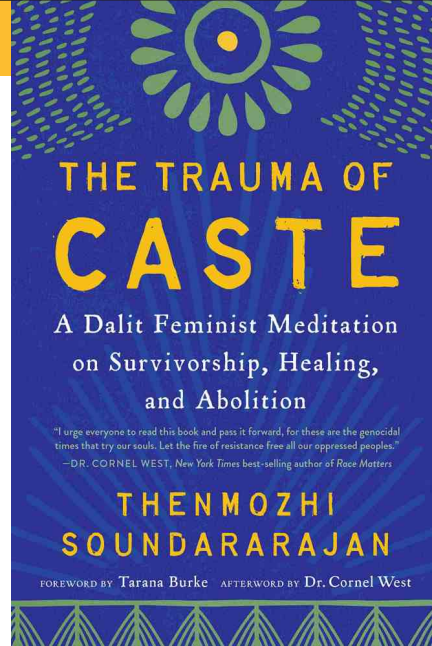
In 2015 Equality Labs conducted the first-ever survey about caste in the US. I worked with the indefatigable Dr Maari Zwick-Maitreyi, who helmed this landmark contribution to Dalit feminist scholarship in North America. We decided to conduct this survey after repeatedly hearing Dalit Americans talk about the caste discrimination they had experienced, whereas dominant-caste South Asian Americans said caste wasn't an issue. It's hard now to recall a time when people didn't acknowledge caste in the United States, but 2016 was a very different moment. Many academics did not support breaking the taboo of caste and a culture of silence and denial ran rampant within the South Asian American community. Dalits were also afraid to be publicly identified and spoke openly about their fears about being outed. Despite that fear, people trusted our team and we were honored to reach out to hundreds of South Asian groups across caste, language and political spectrums.

While we gathered data, interviewing people in front of South Asian markets, businesses and

religious centers, dominant-caste individuals hurled caste slurs at us. Our researchers in multiple states all experienced open bigotry and disgust. One South Asian organisation had an existential crisis over the survey and convened a board meeting to debate sharing the survey. We stood before that board with courage and explained that the community was already divided, so this data would create space for powerful conversations that would not only document the problem but also help everyone heal. That organisation and many others eventually pushed the survey throughout the US. Our hard work helped shed light on caste bias and inspired a new generation of truth telling to dismantle caste supremacy.

Indeed, it is fascinating to look at American history through the lens of caste. Some of the very first records mentioning South Asian immigrants date from the 1700s. Reverend William Bentley, a minister in Salem, Massachusetts, wrote in his diaries about the first Indian who arrived in Salem: "I had the pleasure of seeing for the first time, a native of Indies, who was from Madras. He was of dark complexion, had long black hair and soft countenance. He was tall and well proportioned. He is said to be darker than Indians in general of his own cast." With (we can only assume) nearly no knowledge of India, the good reverend mentions caste. Likely the Indian he met wanted to emphasise that he was not lower-caste when he noted his complexion. According to the records of the South Asian American Digital Archive, South Asians began immigrating to the United States in larger numbers in the late 1800s. These early immigrants were primarily Sikh men from the Punjab region of British India who settled in the western parts of the United States (California, Oregon and Washington) and western Canada (British Columbia).

They fled the English's brutal colonial regime that forced Indians to grow cash crops rather than food to benefit a booming industrial Britain. Affected by drought, famine and back-breaking taxation, they looked abroad for better prospects. For the most part they worked in the US and Canada as labourers



in fields, lumberyards and mills. 17 They helped build the railroads and, alongside Mexican and Filipino laborers, cleared the swamps in California's Central Valley to create fertile farmland. In the personal archives of Dalit Canadian Anita Lal's family, we have an early account of harm done to Dalits by dominant-caste immigrants within the community of Punjabi Sikh laborers on the west coast. Anita's family is one of the oldest Dalit families in North America and the testimony of her great-grandfather

Maiha Ram Mehmi on his experience of casteism in the lumber mills of British Columbia reveals just how long caste has been here in the Americas. When he first came to work in the lumber mill, the dominant castes would not allow him to eat with them; he had to eat alone in his room. He was also forbidden to take shifts in the cookhouse, due to the fact that he was considered impure and dirty. Interestingly enough, a dominant-caste Hindu foreman, Kapoor Singh, noticed this dynamic. When he discovered the cause of the exclusion, he insisted that all workers eat in the same place. This account is one of the first known examples of untouchability in North America; we can only imagine how many more went unrecorded. Here is a brutal reminder that caste-based discrimination in the workplace was happening as soon as South Asians arrived in North America and it has never stopped.

Many white workers of this time were unhappy with immigrants from China and South Asia who were competition for their jobs. Their dissatisfaction spilled into the press with race-baiting coverage like this bigoted article in the Puget Sound American: "Have we a Dusky Peril? Hindu hordes invading the state... prove a worse menace to the working classes than the 'yellow peril' that has so long threatened the Pacific Coast."

These articles also coded their racism with caste; most South Asian laborers were described in the US press as "low-caste Hindoos." Significant focus was given to the different traits of "low-caste" and "high-caste" South Asian immigrants. Those perceived to be low-caste were described as of "poor class physically as well as mentally," "more treacherous, if

possible” than Japanese immigrants, with brains that do “not readily grasp even the elementary problems of this country.” They are “a dark mystic race” living in “tumble-down 'shacks' which a white man, even from southern Europe, would have spurned.” High-caste Hindus were orientalist for their spiritual and intellectual contributions; some were even noted for their exotic genius and their descriptions frequently named them as “high-caste brahmins.” These distinctions did not last long as the tide of racism soon turned all South Asian immigrants into the criminal other.

This bigotry led to a wave of xenophobic protests and in one tragic documented instance led to the Bellingham riots in 1907, in which white mobs went door to door to locate and evict hundreds of Indian immigrants, resulting in many leaving the region forever. In response to the mass violence and political pressure from white workers American politicians passed the exclusionary Naturalization Act of 1906, which notoriously established racial criteria limiting the qualifications for naturalisation so that only white persons and persons of African descent were eligible for US citizenship. The first challenges to this act were from dominant-caste South Asians in the immigration cases of AK Mozumdar and Bhagat Singh Thind. Neither of them challenged the racial stipulation itself but rather made the argument that they were essentially white, given their dominant-caste identity. AK Mozumdar asserted that as a high-caste Hindu, he belonged to the “Aryan” race; therefore, he was a brown “white” person, given the shared Aryan-racial histories of white Europeans and dominant-caste people in South Asia.

Bhagat Singh Thind made the same argument, adding even more severe anti-Black and anti-Indigenous statements. He spoke with pride of the Indian caste system and celebrated his dominant-caste back-ground. He compared the Aryan invaders of India to the European invaders of North America, arguing Aryans were like “the Caucasian people of this country who have taken possession and driven out the native red men.” He also asserted that “the high Caste Hindu regards the aboriginal Indian Mongoloid in the same manner as the American regards the Negro, speaking from a matrimonial standpoint”. Thind even insisted he would support the vicious anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting



interracial marriage. Despite these arguments both Mozumdar and Thind lost their cases. In *US v. Thind*, the court found that people of East Indian origin were ineligible for US citizenship because they did not meet the “common-sense” understanding of “white.” Pervading the decision is racist and casteist commentary like this: “In Punjab and Rajputana, while the invaders seem to have met with more success in the effort to preserve their racial purity, intermarriages did occur producing an intermingling of the two and destroying to a greater or less degree the purity of the 'Aryan' blood. The rules of caste, while calculated to prevent this intermixture, seem not to have been entirely successful.”

In the *Thind* decision, Justice Sutherland also references the Immigration Act of 1917 that banned Asian immigration as further evidence that Indians, as Asians, were excluded from the American polity and that Hindus were not “free born whites.” In the wake of this decision, Mozumdar and up to fifty other Indian Americans had their citizenship revoked. Excerpted with permission from 'The Trauma of Caste: A Dalit Feminist Meditation on Survivorship, Healing and Abolition', Thenmozhi Soundararajan, North Atlantic Books.

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Courtesy: Scroll

Discrimination can't be undone by reservation

Mim Bahadur Pariyar



Sometimes back a national media published a news regarding the unusual and hateful names of Dalit people in their citizenship documents. The news disclosed the naked reality of our society where the traditional caste system is deeply entrenched. It shows how the so-called upper caste people treat minorities in our society. The officials involved in the citizenship issuance process apparently had no qualms approving the certificates issued to the people whose names were clearly assigned as insults by the people from the so-called upper caste. These civil servants are no doubt academically qualified to hold their respective jobs, but they also lack morality. This is the sad reality of our bureaucracy, which is run by mindless pen-pushers.

The Dalit community of Nepal is the most victimized and oppressed groups of our society. But our society by and large rather than voicing their solidarity with the Dalits, they resent reservation actions like reservations for minority groups.

In a democratic system, certain policies are made to ensure participation and representation of marginalized and deprived groups. In the context of Nepal, Dalits are more deprived of their socio-political and human rights. Due to this discrimination, the presence of Dalits in mainstream politics and state bodies is very little. The very structure of Nepali society is responsible for depriving Dalits of their rights. The caste system doesn't give proper space to Dalits in the social sphere. For example, most Dalit candidates in local level election didn't get votes from non-Dalits, particularly for executive position. Take any local unit of Nepal and you will invariably find that its head is a non-Dalit. This indicates the poor view of our society towards Dalits. The majority of non-Dalits openly dismiss a candidate if he or she happens to be a Dalit or a member of other minority groups. They cannot imagine a person whom they have oppressed and insulted all their lives becoming an elected official. This anti-Dalit stance runs deep in our society.

So ensure Dalit participation, the government has provided nine percent reservation facility for the community. It has done the same thing for women, indigenous groups, disabled, Madhesi, Muslim, etc. But for many non-Dalits, reservation for Dalit community is intolerable. They argue that the reservation for

Dalits has reduced the opportunity for qualified non-Dalit people. If so then why is Nepal, which was ruled over by the so-called upper caste people for centuries, still underdeveloped?

It is only the reservation policy for Dalits that irks the non-Dalits. They believe the Nepali society is free of caste discrimination and that the reservation facility for Dalits is unnecessary. Clearly, as non-Dalits, they have no idea what it is like to be a Dalit in Nepal. They certainly do not reflect on their own biases when they vote, when they hire workers and even when they make friends.

They don't know the pain and suffering faced by Dalits. They don't know what it is to be ostracized and discriminated against all their lives. They don't know the feeling of being told not to enter someone's house or a temple. They don't know the shame planted by society on the minds of Dalit children, who grow up to resent themselves when they grow up because they were born to the so-called lower caste family. Therefore, the nine percent reservation quota for Dalits is not enough to right all the wrongs they have gone through since ages. But the non-Dalits do not see this, as they have never put up with the humiliation of being a Dalit in Nepali society.

There are many Dalits who don't want reservation as long as the society guarantees equal treatment and respect to them. They say reservation facility can't heal the wounds of caste discrimination. It can't revive the lives of Navaraj BK and Sete Damai, who lost their lives on the account of being Dalits.

Every non-Dalit should come to the terms to the fact that reservation policy is not a compensation for caste discrimination. It is just a gesture offered by the state in hopes of healing the Dalit trauma. To grow up in a hateful environment and compete with those who have been enjoying the structural dividend from ages is unfair to Dalits. Non-Dalits should realize this.

It is easy to criticize or form half-baked opinions. But it takes a lot of introspection, historical understanding and moral courage to understand the pains of Dalits.

Source: The Annapurna Express



Will focus on intersectionality and gender', says Ashwini K.P, first Asian-Dalit woman to be appointed as UN Special Rapporteur on Racism

Gursimran Kaur Bakshi

Ashwini K.P is the first Dalit and Asian woman to be ever appointed as the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Ashwini's research areas include UN Mechanism, Descent and Occupation-based Discrimination.

Her appointment will be made by the United Nations Human Rights Council at its 51st session in November.

As a doctorate fellow, she has engaged, both in the field and academically, in various human rights issues related to caste, discrimination and other similar issues. She was also a part of the UN delegation that represented Indian Dalits.

The Leaflet interviewed Ashwini to know about her struggles and how she will address the upcoming challenges through her new mandate.

Excerpts from the interview:

Q: Congratulations on your appointment. Can you tell us about yourself and your work including your struggles?

A: I hail from the Kolar district in Karnataka. Most of my schooling was in various districts across Karnataka. Thereafter, I completed my graduation from Mount Carmel College, Bangalore and my

Masters from St. Joseph's College, Bangalore. I pursued MPhil and PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).

I come from an Ambedkarite family and because of this, I received academic and activist orientation at a very young age. My parents made sure that I received exposure to Dalit and other progressive movements. This exposure has had an immense impact on developing my understanding of progressive movements, particularly Ambedkarite philosophy and the Anti-caste movement.

As a student, I was active in the student movement at JNU. I was part of the United Dalit students forum at JNU. My PhD thesis was on the international dimension of the human rights of Dalits. And I have closely worked with several grassroots organisations.

These experiences gave me immense exposure and helped me develop both academic and field experience. I have worked as an assistant professor at Mount Carmel College and St. Joseph's College in Bangalore. I worked as a senior campaigner at Amnesty International.

In terms of my struggle, though not overtly, there have been several instances where I have faced hostility for being assertive and vocal about anti-

caste issues. There have been several instances where I have been denied opportunities. In urban and progressive areas, caste and gender discrimination manifest in the most nuanced manner. Being assertive always comes at a cost.

Q: What has been your unique lived experience in India as a Dalit woman? How significant is intersectional discrimination when it comes to explaining the challenges faced by vulnerable communities?

A: Being a Dalit and a woman always adds to the discrimination one is subjected to. I hail from an educated family that gave me a certain privilege in terms of receiving higher education and exposure. However, there have been several instances where I have experienced discrimination based on my social identity.

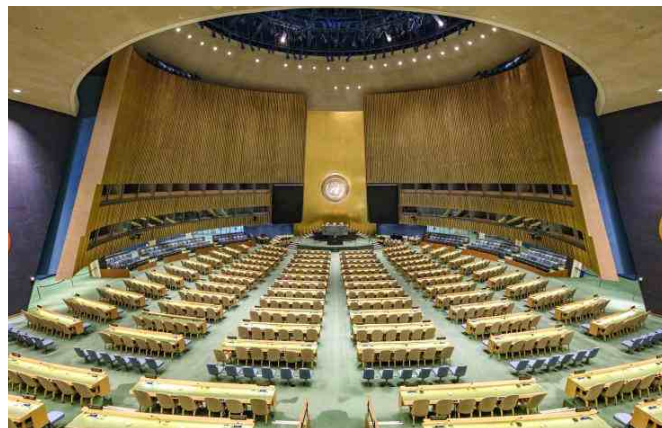
“...I would like to focus on intersectionality and gender within my mandate. It is vital to address the impact of racism and other related intolerance on women and LGBTQI communities.”

For the longest time, the concept of intersectionality was least discussed or never taken into consideration. At present they cannot afford to neglect intersectionality owing to the emergence of the discourse of marginalised women, or of Dalit, Adivasi, Muslims and so on.

It is important to remember that women are not homogenous. The struggle of every woman and other gender binaries in India differ depending on the communities, religions and regions they belong to. It is significant to incorporate the concept of intersectionality, be it in gender, caste, class, region or both in the Anti-caste and feminist movements.

Q: So, do you think this will change now that you hold this prestigious position?

A: I strongly believe in social transformation through representation. My representation in a reputed position like the UN rapporteur will surely help me address my experience as a Dalit woman on a global platform. Representation and presence of marginalised women in prominent positions will surely transform the perspective and approach towards gender, caste, inclusion and



marginalisation.

Q: Talking about India, there have been numerous recent instances where Dalits and Adivasis have been at the receiving end of the violence unleashed by non-state actors. How would you explain India's current position in addressing these issues?

A: Dalits and Adivasi have been at the receiving end from time immemorial. Despite protective legislation for Dalits and Adivasis, violence against these communities goes unabated. One of the primary reasons is also the apathy that exists within law enforcement agencies and the impunity certain communities enjoy.

At the end of the day, I believe that the state of mind of individuals matters a lot. We are still in a situation where individuals believe in the supremacy of caste and patriarchy. Therefore, we continue to witness the worst of caste atrocities and gender violence. This only displays the state of mind of individuals who adhere to the conservative thought process.

In terms of legislation and policies, we have one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. There are several protective legislations and policies in place to address violence against Dalits and Adivasi communities. There are numerous policies to address the socio-economic empowerment of Dalits and Adivasis. However, the gap that exists in the implementation of the legislation needs to be addressed.

Q: In India, there are more than 1200 denotified tribes (DNT), nomadic tribes and semi-nomadic tribes who have been given limited recognition for affirmative action. During the colonial

period, they were treated as criminals. What they face is historical discrimination. Can you share your thoughts on this issue?

A: DNTs, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes are one of the most marginalised communities and have been subjected to utmost discrimination and exclusion owing to historical prejudice and stereotype. These communities are spread across India and they are not a homogenous category. I feel it is important to focus on these communities not only at the central level but also at the state level.

For instance, in Karnataka, there have been initiatives by several activists to recognise DNT communities as marginalised groups. The Karnataka government has sent a proposal to the centre to categorise the KaaduGolla community, (which is classified as an Other Backward Class at present) which is one of the pastoral nomadic communities, as a Scheduled tribe.

Various State government initiatives play a significant role in addressing the marginalisation of DNT communities. In addition, there is a dire need for DNT population surveys, research regarding their socio-economic condition and also representation.

“I strongly believe in social transformation through representation. My representation in a reputed position like the UN rapporteur will surely help me address my experience as a Dalit woman on a global platform. Representation and presence of marginalised women in prominent positions will surely transform the perspective and approach towards gender, caste, inclusion and marginalisation”

It is essential to implement constitutional policies and protective legislation to empower the community at the centre and state levels.

Q: Since a lot of your work has been related to caste-based discrimination, how would you address that through your mandate?

A: I have worked on caste as well as race. My mandate specifically focuses on race, racial discrimination and other related intolerance. At the UN, there are several Conventions and Working Groups that focus on descent and occupation-based

discrimination, which is similar to caste-based discrimination. There are specific mandates created so that there is clarity on issues that every mandate-holder handles.

However, descent or caste-based discrimination is no more confined to a particular country or region. Caste-based discrimination is a global issue that many marginalised communities are subjected to across the globe. Domestic policies of every state make a significant difference in addressing issues like caste-based discrimination. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse and assess the policies and legislations and their effective implementation at the country level.

Q: Lately, there have been growing instances of racism against the Indian diaspora. How would you address these issues through your mandate?

A: Racism and violence against the Indian diaspora have become a common phenomenon across the globe. Technological advancement and the rise of social media and the internet have enhanced the space for engagement. However, this has also resulted in hate speech and provocative language towards the Indian diaspora in several states.

This highlights the vacuum of protective legislation in several states towards diaspora or migrant communities. The approach to addressing racism against Indian diaspora communities will vary from state to state depending on the existence or absence of protective legislation in any state pertaining to diaspora communities. In order to address racism against Indian diaspora communities, it is essential to assess the existing policies that safeguard the rights of diaspora communities.

Q: Is there any specific issue that you would like to address through your mandate?

A: It is essential to adopt a diverse and inclusive approach to address racism and other related intolerance. I would like to focus on intersectionality and gender within my mandate. It is vital to address the impact of racism and other related intolerance on women and LGBTQI communities.

Courtesy: The Leaflet

US: Brown University bans caste discrimination throughout campus in a first for the Ivy League

Harmeet Kaur, CNN

Brown University now explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste, joining a number of US colleges and universities in shoring up protections against an ill-understood, insidious form of oppression.

The university's governing body voted this fall to add caste as a protected characteristic to its nondiscrimination policy, alongside categories such as race, religion, sex and gender identity. It's the first Ivy League institution to add such protections for the wider campus community, including students, faculty and staff, according to the advocacy organization Equality Labs.

"The previous policy would have protected people experiencing caste discrimination," Sylvia Carey-Butler, the university's vice president for institutional equity and diversity, said in a news release. "But we felt it was important to lift this up and explicitly express a position on caste equity."

The caste system, which originated in ancient India, is a social hierarchy that historically assigned people to groups based on occupation and moral obligation. It evolved over time to assign a degree of "spiritual purity" at birth, in turn determining everything from a person's societal rank and occupation to what they ate and who they married. At the bottom of that social order, considered so low that they fall outside the traditional hierarchy and are relegated to the worst jobs in society, is a group that now calls itself Dalits.

Though the caste system and caste-based discrimination have been legally outlawed in India and other South Asian countries, they continue to manifest in society. Dalits and members of other oppressed castes routinely face challenges both in India and elsewhere. With Indians now comprising one of the largest groups of new US immigrants, caste bias and discrimination stand to become more of a problem stateside.

US tech companies, which employ a high concentration of South Asian workers, have grappled with issues of caste in recent years, and caste-oppressed students at

US colleges and universities have previously told CNN that they have faced slurs, microaggressions and social exclusion on campus because of their caste identities.

Those outside South Asian communities often don't understand how these dynamics operate, given that they unfold within members of the same racial and ethnic group. This has left caste-oppressed people in settings such as college campuses with little recourse.

The recent move by Brown aims to change that. A group of Brown students worked with administrators to bring about specific protections for caste, which they said "legitimizes caste-oppressed experiences and provides a framework for reporting incidents," according to the university news release.

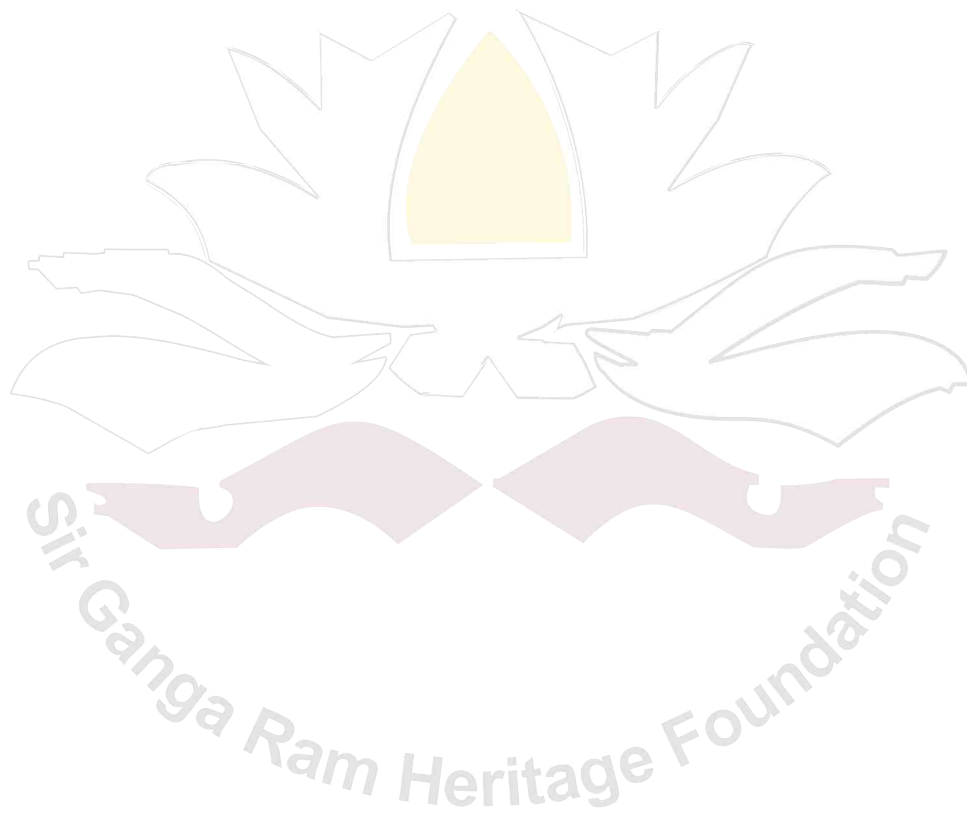
"Many caste-oppressed people remain 'closeted' about their caste identity in fear of experiencing retaliation or discrimination," the students said in a statement. "The new language of the University's nondiscrimination policy offers caste-oppressed students who may be hiding their caste identity an option to report and address the harm they experience." The California State University system made caste a protected status earlier, while schools such as the University of California, Davis; Colby College and Brandeis University have adopted similar measures. Harvard University instituted caste protections for student workers last year as part of its contract with the Harvard Graduate Student Union.

The moves have been heralded by Dalit rights advocates, but they've also encountered resistance from some Hindu organizations. After Cal State banned caste discrimination, two professors represented by the Hindu American Foundation filed a lawsuit against the university system alleging that the policy unfairly targets Hindus and mischaracterizes their religion.

Despite its origins in Hinduism, the caste system has since spread to other South Asian religious communities. Similar systems are also found in some other parts of the world.

Source: CNN





Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation