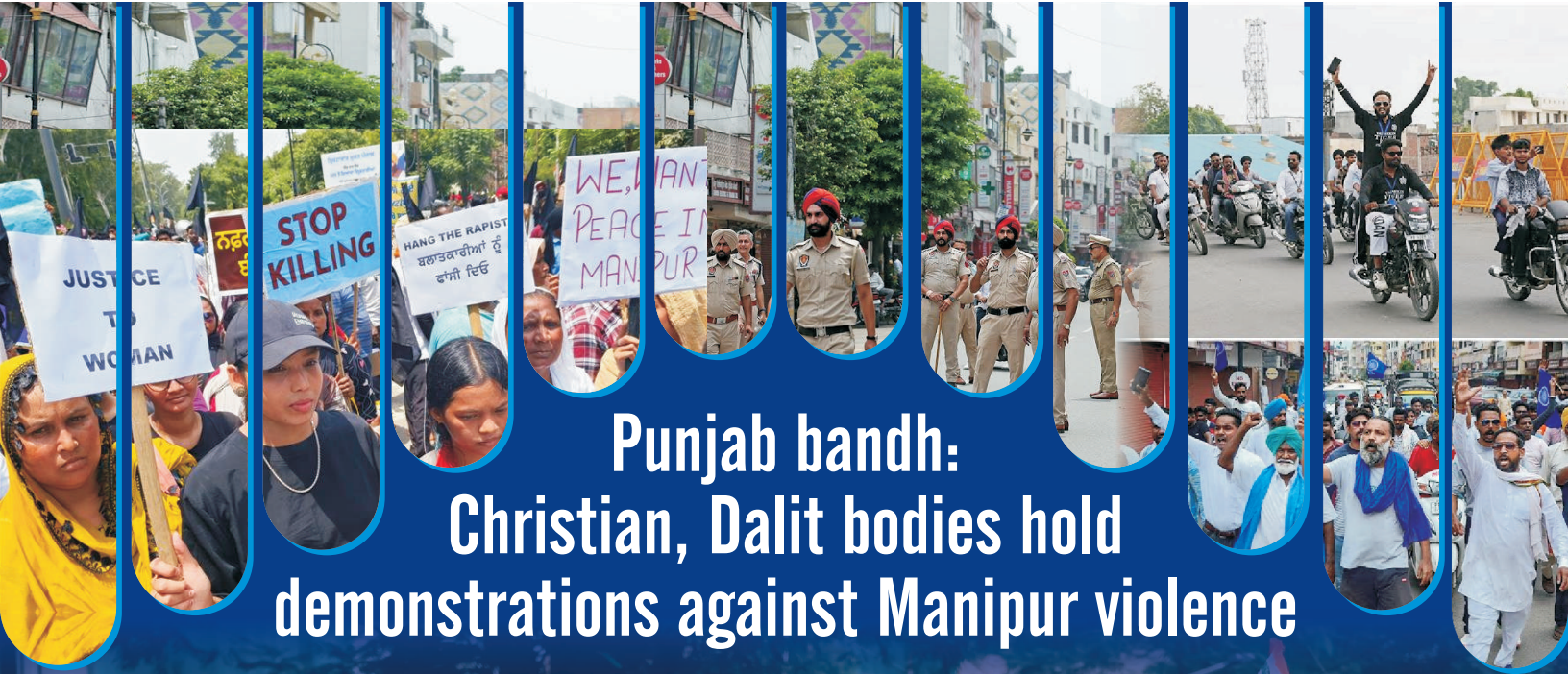
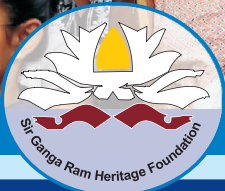


Quarterly MINO-VIEW

Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies



Punjab bandh: Christian, Dalit bodies hold demonstrations against Manipur violence



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

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Editorial

Welcome to the latest issue of Mino-View. In recent years, most of the South Asian countries have seen increasing incidents of discrimination and violence against marginalized communities, leading to growing concern about fundamental rights and overall safety in their respective countries. From a sharp rise in student suicides to potential religious and minority persecution, there are ongoing calls for the governments to take action to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all citizens. It was reported that six out of every ten houses of non-Dalit communities in Phuliwang village of Nepal are empty now and the economic gap between Dalits and non-Dalits is ever-growing, leading to fewer choices for Dalit children's education. Dalits children are Dalits, the substandard academic framework in those institutions puts them at a disadvantage. On the other hand, India has seen a 70% increase in student suicides between 2011 and 2021. This comes as India observes World Suicide Prevention Day at IIT Delhi committing suicide within two months. The number of student suicides in India has increased every year since 2011. These include students who commit suicide due to caste-based discrimination in their educational institutions. Such humiliation of humanity and incidents on the basis of religion are seen everywhere. For example, incidents of vandalism of Hindu minority temples and places of worship in Bangladesh and attacks on Christian churches in Pakistan are very alarming. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has called for India to be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its alleged systematic persecution of religious minorities under the Modi government. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues has also expressed concern about the steady and alarming erosion of fundamental rights, particularly of religious and other minorities in India, calling it massive, systematic and dangerous. These trends and their implications for US foreign policy should not be ignored. So, As long as there is injustice, the society will not flourish. However governments can play an important and key role to bring about such a change. Take the example of India, where women manual scavengers protested in Delhi demanding the government to stop lying about figures on deaths in septic tanks. The Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) has been leading the "Stop Killing Us" campaign for over a year. They claim that the government's denial of the actual number of deaths shows its caste mentality. Such behaviors need to be changed. The governments must prioritize education and mental health resources for marginalized communities, as well as stop discrimination and increase regulation and resources for community schools. It should also address the allegations of religious and minority persecution and work towards upholding fundamental rights for all.



US must address 'massive dangerous situation in India' amid persecution of minorities, warns USCIRF



The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has once again called for India to be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) due to its alleged systematic persecution of religious minorities under the Modi government.

In a recent hearing on India, USCIRF commissioners expressed grave concerns about the deteriorating human rights and religious freedom situation in the country, Muslim Mirror reported.

USCIRF Commissioner David Curry emphasized the severity of the situation, stating, "I've become convinced that India has the most sophisticated, systematic persecution of religious minorities by any democratic government. And I don't say that lightly."

Chair of USCIRF, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, noted, "Religious freedom conditions in India have notably declined in recent years. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Dalits, Adivasis are experiencing increased levels of attacks and acts of intimidation... These trends and their implications for US foreign policy should not be ignored."

Vice Chair Frederick A. Davie pointed out that USCIRF's reporting has highlighted legal restrictions in several Indian states, including those on religious conversion, religious dress, educational curriculum, interfaith marriage and cow slaughter, negatively impacting various communities in India.

The USCIRF hearing also saw international voices weighing in on the matter. Dr. Fernand de Varennes, United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues, warned, "If we don't have that, we are heading towards a massive dangerous situation in

India, [which] will have repercussions on the United States."

Sarah Yager, Washington Director of Human Rights Watch, criticized the Biden administration's support for Prime Minister Modi, stating, "With this unmitigated demonstration of support by US officials, we question what reason [Modi] has to change course... China's rise cannot be an excuse for US officials to overlook, ignore or play down the human rights abuses of its friends."

Sunita Viswanath, co-founder of Hindus for Human Rights, spoke on behalf of several organizations and expressed disappointment that representatives from affected communities were not invited to speak.

She said, "The rejection by the Biden and Trump Administrations of USCIRF's recommendation to designate India as a CPC for three years in a row is a troubling precedent."

Irfan Nooruddin, Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani Professor of Indian Politics at Georgetown University, drew attention to rising mob violence in India, stating, "Vigilante groups... harass, beat and murder Muslim men rumored to be smuggling beef, dating a Hindu girl or insulting a deity. No evidence is required." He called on the US government to encourage India to defend religious minorities more decisively.

The USCIRF's repeated recommendation to designate India as a CPC remains unimplemented by the US Department of State, but the issue continues to gain international attention and scrutiny.

Source: thekashmiriyat

Share of Students Among Suicide Victims in India Grew 70% Over Past Decade, NCRB Data Shows



The number of students who committed suicide in India rose by 70% between 2011 and 2021, Moneycontrol reported. September 10 was World Suicide Prevention Day. In India, its observance comes just days after coaching centre hub Kota recorded its highest number of student suicides since 2015 and two Dalit students at IIT Delhi committed suicide within two months.

Data provided by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) says that 13,089 students died by suicide in 2021 (the year of its latest report on suicides).

This represents a 70% increase from 7,696 student suicides in 2011.

The number of student suicides in India since 2011 has generally increased every year.

The share of students among India's overall suicide victims has also increased. It stood at 8% of the total in 2021, having grown by 2.3 percentage points since 2011.

For both the number and share of student suicides in India, an uptick is observed in the year 2020.

While the NCRB's Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) reports do not provide a breakdown of the reported causes for suicide among students specifically, they provide these breakdowns for age groups.

Discounting "other" or unknown causes, the most

frequent cause of suicide listed by NCRB's 2021 ADSI report for victims below 18 years of age was family problems (3,233 cases, or 30% of the total in this age group).

This was followed by "love affairs" (1,495 cases, or 14% of the total), illness (1408 cases, or 13% of the total) and "failure in examination" (864 cases, or 8% of the total).

Mental illness made up the majority of cases listed under illness (58%).

The share out of Indians of all age groups that ADSI reports say committed suicide due to "failure in examination" has an average value of 1.8% and a median of 1.77% between 2011 and 2021.

The reported shares for this cause remained between 1.8% and 2.0% between 2011 and 2019, falling to 1.4% in 2020 and and 1.0% in 2021.

Failure in examination was listed as the cause of suicide in 1,673 cases in 2021. Out of this, 991 victims were male and 682 were female. NCRB did not attribute any transgender suicides to this cause in 2021.

NCRB's data also has a breakdown of suicides by



city. In 2019 the last year of its reports where classes were held in-person the bureau recorded 136 suicides from Kota, out of which it attributed seven to “failure in examination”.

The Indian Express reported that according to Kota police data, a total of eight students committed suicide in the city in 2019.

Now that classes have gone back to offline mode, student suicides have risen again in Kota. Citing Kota police data, IE's report says that the number of student suicides rose from zero in 2021 to fifteen in 2022.

This year has so far seen 23 student suicides in the city (with four in August itself), the highest since 2015, during which 17 students committed suicide according to the city's police department.

Kota's district administration has responded by directing hostels and paying guest accommodations to install spring-loaded fans in every room “to provide mental support and security to the students studying/living in them”.

Nelson Vinod Moses, founder of the Suicide Prevention of India foundation, told Moneycontrol that the COVID-19 pandemic caused an increase in mental health struggles among young adults in India.

“During this period, [young adults] were dependent on digital learning and when they were put back into the normal world, many were unable



to even communicate properly, develop friendships and bond socially,” he said.

The financial news outlet also reported that the 2020 National Education Policy reinforced the importance of counselling systems within education institutions.

But Itisha Nagar, an assistant professor of psychology at Delhi University, told The Wire that societal factors must be addressed in tandem with providing counselling to students.

“Just giving counselling to a student will not matter much, because society defines a 'successful' student as someone who clears IITs or such competitive exams by defeating lakhs of other students. We need a society where a kid's worth is tied to talent or extra-curricular activities or hobbies they enjoy, not marks,” she said.





Punjab bandh: Christian, Dalit bodies hold demonstrations against Manipur violence

Several Christian and Dalit bodies held demonstrations at several places, including Jalandhar, Ferozpur and Moga, as part of their 'Punjab bandh' call against the Manipur violence.

Shops remained shut in many areas of Jalandhar and Ferozpur districts as protesters shouted slogans against the central government for the violence in the north-eastern state. Ahead of the bandh call given by different Dalit and Christian organisations, police were deployed at many places in the state.

In Jalandhar, several markets remained shut with representatives of Dalit and Christian communities staging a 'dharna' in the city' Kapurthala Chowk. Police were deployed at Rama Mandi and Nakodar Chowk, said officials.

The impact of the Punjab bandh call was also visible in Ferozpur district where shops and markets at several places remained shut.

In Moga, protesters said they would appeal to shopkeepers to keep their shops closed in protest against the violence in Manipur.

A police officer in Moga said adequate security arrangements had been made in the city.

In Ludhiana, however, markets and other commercial establishments remained open. Deputy Commissioner of Police, Ludhiana, Varinder Singh Brar, said anti-riot squads and vehicles had been deployed at several sensitive points in the city.

Source: Tribune India



Hindu temple in Bangladesh vandalised, idols desecrated; accused arrested

Sahidul Hasan Khokon



A 36-year-old man vandalised the idol of a deity at a Hindu temple in Bangladesh's Brahmanbaria district. The incident caused an uproar among the local Hindu community.



deplorable act.

According to Jagdish Das, the President of Niamatpur Sarvajanin Durga Temple, the sudden act of vandalism sparked anger and discontent among the members of the local Hindu community.

The incident unfolded at the Niamat Pur Durga temple, located in Niamatpur village. The accused has been identified as Khalil Mia.

As the news of the vandalism spread, the locals quickly took matters into their own hands and assisted the police in chasing and catching the accused.

Brahmanbaria Police Superintendent, Mohammad Shakhawat Hossain, confirmed Khalil Mia's arrest but stated that the motive behind his act remains undisclosed. It is yet to be determined why he resorted to such a

Investigations have revealed that Khalil Mia had come to visit his sister's house in Niamatpur village when the unfortunate incident occurred. A quarrel with some local residents apparently escalated, leading him to vandalise not just one, but five to six idols within the Durga temple.

Jagdish Das filed a case under the Hurting Religious Sentiments and Speedy Trial Act. Authorities have assured a thorough investigation, ensuring that appropriate legal actions will be taken against the accused.

Source: India Today

BORN DALIT: Always in and out

Rajesh Chavda

On September 23, 1917, Bhimrao Ambedkar cried like a baby under a tree in Vadodara.

As the newly appointed military secretary of the Baroda state, Ambedkar moved to the city of Vadodara. But nobody would rent him a house because he was an “untouchable”. He eventually had to lie about his caste identity to the owners of a Parsi inn to get a place to stay. But when it was discovered that he was Dalit, he was attacked by his Parsi neighbours.

Ambedkar - who had studied at New York's Columbia University and the London School of Economics - was forced to flee like a fugitive and spend a night under a tree.

He later recounted that he “wept bitterly. After all, I was deprived of my precious possession - namely my shelter.”

I grew up in a village just 40 kilometres away from Vadodara. My parents still live there.

How much has casteism changed since 1917?

I now live in the UK, where I work as a corporate lawyer. I visited my parents for two weeks in August.

I have two brothers. They were not as lucky as I have been and were unable to study beyond high school. Since they found it difficult to find good jobs, I set up a photocopying business for them in 2004.

But with the Covid lockdown of 2020, they had to shut their shops. When they reopened in January this year, the income from the business was insufficient to sustain both of them. We decided that this business would be handled only by our elder brother and I would set up another business for the younger one.



After speaking with a few people to get ideas about potential gaps in the market, we decided to set up a stationery shop in a neighboring town. I started looking for a shop to rent there.

I found three shops. When I went to negotiate with the owners of the first two shops, I did not want my caste identity to become a hurdle so I told them I was a corporate lawyer in the UK and that I was going to finance the business. Both quoted me an exorbitant amount of rent.

When I went to see the third man, I changed my approach. I did not tell him what I did for a living.

That meant, however, that he did not have a basis on which to try to form a bond of trust. So he immediately looked for another potential source of familiarity: he asked me about my caste identity.

I had to make a choice. If I told him my real caste identity, he would not rent the shop to me.

I chose the safer option. I told him I was Chavda, a

name that is used by members of both “pure” and “impure” castes.

“Oh!” he said. “We are of the same caste! I have nothing to worry about.”

I got the lease - only because I lied about my caste identity.

This was not the first time I have had to do this.

In 2015, when I moved from London to Delhi to join one of India's top law firms, I rented a flat in one of the city's poshest parts of the city so that we could be as close to my daughter's school as possible. While in a conversation about our neighbours with someone familiar with the building, he suddenly warned, “Don't be friends with the flat on the second floor - they are from a scheduled caste.”

Here was a person who lived in one of the city's most affluent neighbourhoods who thought a Dalit did not deserve the friendship of a person from a privileged caste. I wondered if they would have rented me a flat if they had known my caste identity.

Although I was a partner with one of the country's top Indian law firms, I did not have the courage to reveal to him that I too was from a scheduled caste.

It always feels unnatural, unwarranted and imposed when I have to identify myself as Dalit. Because caste identity is an artificial construct. The caste system does not need to exist.

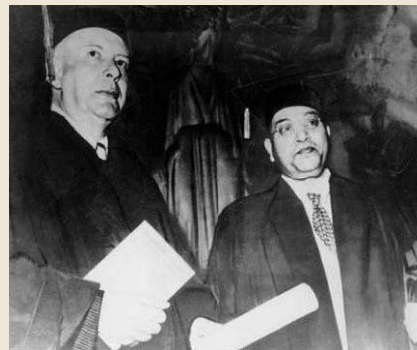
However, growing up in an Indian village, there was no escape from my imposed identity. Everyone in the village knew what caste I had been born into.

But when I was away, where people didn't know me, I always lied when they asked me about my caste.

When I went to study at National Law School in Bangalore, there was again no escape as I had received the benefit of reservations as a Dalit. I assumed that everyone knew my caste identity

because of the way our names were listed in the register of students.

Thus, until I was 22, I was mostly out as Dalit against my will.



When I started working in Mumbai and later in London and Singapore, a comforting cloak of anonymity descended. When people asked me about my caste identity, I mostly lied - although I worried about being found out.

On social media and in my articles, however, I have been open about my caste identity. But this openness has often made me anxious.

I continue to lie about my caste identity in situations where I foresee a disadvantage in revealing that I was born Dalit.

Thus, there is no real coming out in caste.

It's always in and out.

I had a conversation about this recently with a friend who was born Dalit. He is a very successful executive at a major global corporation and works in Europe.

He has changed his last name as he does not want people to know of his caste position.

When we discussed the dilemmas of revealing our caste identity, he asked why we would willingly bring this curse of the Hindu order upon us.

I am crying dry tears as I write this on September 23, 2023 - 106 years after Ambedkar cried like a baby in Vadodara.

Source: Scroll India

Dalit politics: Identity or rights?



I would not say that I am terribly ashamed to have been born into a Dalit family. Nor am I proud of my caste identity. Far from it: My social identity has been a curse all my life! In many towns and villages of Nepal-as well as amongst some casteist Nepalis abroad-I would have to conceal my surname just to rent accommodation, to find employment to socialise with everybody!

Dalit identity has always been a dilemma, a double-edged sword. Both individually and collectively. On the one hand, your identity is considered so impure, so inauspicious, so degraded and so disgusting that you are often forced to stay hidden. On the other hand, you are seeking to fight for your communal right as a Dalit community! How can you disown the common identity once you are determined to fight?

Individuals and families have used different strategies to protect themselves from caste oppression. Many Dalits use so-called upper-caste surnames, or tweak their actual surnames, in order to shield themselves from open discrimination.

But the concealment of caste becomes problematic when people attempt to win a place in government service or technical education under the quota system. The issue has become so widespread that the National Dalit Commission is working on a list of surnames used by Dalits in order to prevent others from benefiting from the quota allocated to Dalits.

Party politics

Dalit identity is difficult not just at the individual and familial level, but at the community level too. As in parts of India, growing numbers of Nepali Dalits have begun to hate their label as Dalit. There are multiple reasons for this disgust with the word.

First, there is lack of awareness among the youth, in particular, that the term Dalit is not the same as

untouchable. The former is a political identity-and not the acceptance of a lower status, as many seem to think-used to fight caste oppression. Second, importantly, many ordinary Dalits are fed up with party politics-mostly as Dalit wings of mainstream parties-that purports to work for justice and equality for Dalits, but have actually been pawned by supposed upper caste leaders.

Third, many suffering Dalits are disgusted with Dalit non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other organisations that run many projects for Dalit welfare. They do bring some change in the lives of some Dalits through, for example, the provision of scholarships, access to basic healthcare and drinking water, pigs and cows and such material support so that impoverished Dalit households might be able to make some income. These are good, but there is little change in society: No sign of the belief and practice of untouchability subsiding.

Even more frustratingly, the lives of some of these Dalit politicians and NGO people have changed significantly. They ride expensive cars and own fancy homes; they travel overseas and some are permanently settled in advanced countries. All this, I believe, has increasingly angered ordinary Dalits and much of that anger has been centred on the word Dalit.

Some purported low caste Newar communities in Kathmandu Valley have grown so fed up that they have officially withdrawn themselves from the list of Dalits. Newars have a separate caste hierarchy and there is still a huge problem of casteism there. Some of those castes placed at the bottom of the Newar caste hierarchy, like Poda and Chyame, continue to suffer exclusion and humiliation. Still, they do not

want to be part of the Dalit movement to better their place both within and without the Newar community.

So, the pressing issue is: What do Dalits do with their identity, as a collective? As a much-needed movement? Broadly speaking, do we engage in the form of pahichan ko rajniti (identity politics) or adhikar ko rajniti (right-based politics)? Or do we choose both at the same time?

Prof Steven Folmar of Wake Forest University in the US is one of the few Western scholars who has persistently researched Nepali Dalits and published significantly and who is genuinely keen to see their status changed. In his 2007 article in the journal Himalaya, Folmar rightly observed that Dalit identity is extremely complex and that not every Dalit would aspire to it. Importantly, including in his another article (a chapter in a book edited by Susan Hangen and Mahendra Lawoti), he pointed out that Dalit identity politics is very different from the identity politics of the indigenous and ethnic nationalities-which saw a big rise in the 1990s.

I think Dalit politicians, activists and intellectuals should take the above suggestion seriously. They should discuss and debate and arrive at a conclusion about whether Dalits should fight for their identity or for their right-or both. Many established names in the Dalit movement claim that they have been fighting for Dalit identity. They seem to think that the common experience of ostracisation, humiliation, caste violence, poverty, landlessness and lack of access to power and privilege themselves are the fundamental bases of Dalit identity. They thus suggest that Dalits should take pride in their castes and in their identity as the oppressed groups and fight.

In my humble opinion, Dalit identity politics is not going to go very far. We do not have sufficient grounds to claim a separate identity like ethnic and indigenous communities. We do not have a geographic concentration, nor do we have a separate language, nor do we have a distinct religion and culture; nor do we boast ethnic costumes, dances and songs. Ethnographically speaking, it is difficult to see where our identity stands!

One may think that the people suffering from the

traditional practice of untouchability have the common identity of Dalit. This seems quite feasible, but again there are problems. Even though academic, policy and political discourses rarely mention this fact, a degree of caste-based exclusion and humiliation is experienced by virtually all castes and subcastes. Caste is a graded hierarchy where, for example, a conservative Bahun would not accept rice prepared by a Chhetri, even though both are said to be twice-born.

Most ordinary Dalits do not care much about their district caste identity, let alone the broad Dalit identity. Caste associations of the Damai, Kami and Sarki-or that of any other Dalit group for that matter-have not been successful. Nor have Dalit-only organisations flourished. This implies that they prefer assimilation to separation (through the ethnicisation of caste identity) from other groups.

Assimilate into society

Frankly, we are tired of social distancing: We want to eliminate any social barrier for good. We want to get closer to other communities, not go further away from them, albeit through mutual respect and dignity. This common interest of the Dalit masses to assimilate into society is also reflected in that, so much exclusion and humiliation notwithstanding, a vast majority of Dalits have not given up the Hindu religion and culture. One could argue that this is due to lack of awareness of the damaging impact of religion on their lives, which is also true. Whatever the cause, most Dalits desire greater acceptance in the wider society, including among the “upper castes”. Culturally and racially, Dalits are similar to the Brahmins and Chhetris.

To conclude, the ethnicisation of Dalits may be inevitable, but that should not be our major concern. Our struggle should essentially focus on the restoration of rights. We fight the war of rights. We want our rights restored; we want to be able to live a life of equality and dignity, free from discrimination based on birth into a particular family, community. Once the traditional caste-based oppression ends, the word Dalit-the name of our collective identity-becomes obsolete.

Source: Kathmandu Post



UN expert says there is alarming erosion of minorities' rights in India

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Fernand de Varennes, has said that there is a steady and alarming erosion of fundamental rights, particularly of religious and other minorities in India.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the UN Special Rapporteur during a hearing organized by the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) said the situation in India can be summarised in three words - 'massive, systematic and dangerous'.

"India risks becoming one of the world's main generators of instability, atrocities and violence because of the massive scale and gravity of the violations and abuses targeting mainly religious and other minorities such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and others. It is not just individual or local, it is systematic and a reflection of religious nationalism," he said.

The USCIRF chair, Abraham Cooper, said Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Dalits and Adivasis are experiencing 'increased levels of attacks and acts of intimidation' in India. He said the nationalist government led by Narendra Modi in India has continued to suppress minority voices and those advocating on their behalf through surveillance, harassment, demolition of property and detention under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. These trends and their implication for the US foreign policy should not be ignored, he said.

Abraham Cooper pointed out that for the past several years, religious freedom conditions in India have deteriorated, capturing international attention and highlighting the need for continued discussions and engagement on policy options for advancing religious freedom in the country.

The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan US government advisory body created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Its recommendations are not binding on the US government.

On May 2 this year, India rejected a report by the USCIRF that highlighted severe violations of religious freedom in the country. It is to mention here that since 2020, the USCIRF has recommended that the US Department of State designate India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).-KMS

Source: Pak Observer

'Violence against Dalits growing... all part of RSS bid to re-establish caste': Kerala minister

Shaju Philip

K Radhakrishnan, one of the most prominent Dalit faces of the CPI(M) in Kerala, speaks about facing bias at a temple and “the remains of the caste system” in the state

Kerala Temple Affairs and SC/ST Welfare Minister K Radhakrishnan's statement that he had faced caste discrimination at a Kannur temple, with priests reportedly reluctant to hand over a lamp to him, embarrassed the LDF government, which takes pride in the state's renaissance values and cites appointment of Dalit priests in temples in 2018 as part of its inclusive policy. The Akhila Kerala Thanthri Samajam, an organisation of top priests, said the incident was the result of a “misunderstanding” on the minister's part and that nobody was discriminated against in temples. A



CPI(M) central committee member, Radhakrishnan rose from the ranks in the party, starting from its youth wing DYFI and is seen as the most prominent Dalit face of the party in Kerala. The five-term legislator, who is also the state president of a CPI(M)-affiliated farm workers' union, speaks to The Indian Express about the incident, why the caste system endures and what needs to be done to fight it. Excerpts:

You said that the incident at the Kannur temple occurred a few months back. Why did you raise it now?

Radhakrishnan: My statement should be seen against the backdrop of recent atrocities against Dalits across the country. I want to bring focus to the Dalit hunt underway in the country. I was pained hearing recent incidents of cruelty towards Dalits in many states. In Uttar Pradesh, a Dalit was beaten to death for asking for his wages. In Madhya Pradesh, a BJP leader urinated on a tribal youth. All these incidents indicate that caste-based violence is growing in the country. I see these incidents as part of the SanghParivar agenda to re-establish the caste system.

Do you believe caste discrimination also exists in Kerala?

Radhakrishnan: I do not see it as an isolated incident in Kerala or a temple here. Such incidents are happening everywhere. In Kerala, the remnants of the caste system still linger in the minds of certain people. The statement should be seen from a larger perspective. Kerala has seen movements aimed at eradicating the caste system and ensuring equality. We had several renaissance movements in Kerala, Dalits have benefited from them, our state has a progressive approach. However, contemporary Indian conditions provide impetus to such regressive attitudes.



Who is responsible for this situation?

Radhakrishnan: I do not want to blame or find fault with any particular segment in society. I do not think that temple priests are alone responsible for this discrimination. The need of the hour is a concerted fight against the caste system. Our aim is a casteless society, but that cannot be achieved overnight. Instead, we require a mass movement against heinous acts like the one in that temple.

Do you think Dalits should take the lead in such a movement?

Radhakrishnan: All segments of society should take a common approach to end the caste system. If only one particular community fights against it, such a movement would be sectarian.

I hear from backward communities that they want an increase in monetary assistance and freebies. But more importantly, we need to find solutions for the problems at a systemic level. No amount of financial assistance can change lives if caste remains.

I felt contempt (at how I was treated).

Why did you not take any action against the priests?

Radhakrishnan: The temple affairs department could have suspended them for a certain period. But such an action does not solve the issue. My revelation was meant to prompt a change in the attitudes of the people who still want to see continuation of this discrimination. The debate

should make people change their mindset.

The temple authorities claim they acted as per rituals...

Radhakrishnan: Then why don't they think about the sanctity of the money dropped into hundis at temples? There is no untouchability towards the currency and coins. Currency notes coming to the temple would have gone through the hands of Muslims, Christians... Why do they not impose untouchability on money?

The previous LDF government created history by appointing Dalit priests. What feedback do they give you?

Radhakrishnan: These Dalit priests are performing very well and have created an impact. But there have been attempts to discriminate. They faced resistance at some places from a section of the faithful. But the department intervened in a timely manner.

A group of Dalit priests have moved the High Court challenging the Travancore Devaswom (temple affairs) Board's practice of appointing only Malayala Brahmins as chief priests at the Sabarimala temple. What is your take?

Radhakrishnan: We are not against any faith, we will go as per the court directive. We adopted the same approach on the issue of women's entry to the Sabarimala temple. At the same time, we will not hurt any faith.

Courtesy: TIE

NEPAL: Dalit students at a disadvantage in under-resourced community schools



Phuliwang in Annapurna Rural Municipality-10 is a picturesque village around a three-hour bus ride and then an hour's walk from Pokhara. The village was originally inhabited mostly by the indigenous Gurung community and Dalit community. Most of the Gurung families have moved away to the cities and if the Dalits had options they would too, for a better life elsewhere, says Ramshree BK, a local woman.

"Well-off families, mostly non-Dalits from the village, left for cities seeking a better future for their children. They have the resources to send their children to private schools in the cities so they left," said Ramshree. "But we don't have the same resources so we have to stay back and send our children to village schools hoping the education they are receiving will be useful." Two of Ramshree's grandchildren attend the Janasewa Basic School in the village while one granddaughter goes to Uma Secondary School in the neighbouring Dangsing village.

Ramshree's worry for her grandchildren's future is not unfounded. In the last academic session, 12 students sat the Secondary School Examination (SEE) from Uma Secondary School. Their average GPA score was 2.41 while the maximum a student can get is 4. "The children aren't doing very well academically," said Ramshree. "It could be because of the quality of education they are receiving at their school."

Of the total 29 students at Janasewa Basic School which runs classes from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to grade three, 26 are Dalits while three are from the Gurung community. The lack of teachers has affected the quality of education at the school, says Anita BK, the principal. The school has a total of three teachers with the ECD facilitator also being assigned to teach students in higher classes. "The ECD department is handled by an assistant. We need one more teacher, but haven't been able to hire one due to budget constraints," said Anita.

Dangsing village, where Uma Secondary School is located, is another Gurung-dominated village interspersed with some Dalit households. The school

has a total of 117 students--98 of them Dalit. The school has recruited two private teachers as they were short-staffed. Currently, the school has 14 teachers--two for ECD, 10 government-appointed and two hired privately. "We need to hire one more teacher to run classes smoothly. We depend on donations to give the privately hired teachers the minimum pay," said principal Buddhi Bahadur Gurung. Like in Phuliwang, non-Dalit families who can afford have sent their children to schools in the cities while Dalit students attend the local schools. In Kimche village, which is an hour's walk from Phuliwang, 95 percent of students attending the village schools are Dalits.

There are a total of 51 community schools in Annapurna Rural Municipality, Kaski. According to the data of the Educational Management Information System, there are 4,033 students from child development centres to grade 10 in the rural municipality. Among them, 2,057 (around 51 percent) are Dalit students while around 28 percent of students are from the Khas-Arya cluster and 20 percent are indigenous Janajatis. According to the Education Coordination Unit in Kaski, the student number is quite low in rural areas and Dalit students outnumber students from other communities in most of the settlements.

Tanchok Basic School in Majhgaun in ward 7 of the rural municipality has 27 students in the current academic year. Twenty-five students are from Dalit communities while there is one each from Khas-Arya and Janajati communities. At Vidya Jyoti Basic School in ward 8, there are just nine students and seven are Dalit. According to the national census 2021, Annapurna Rural Municipality has a total population of 22,099--Khas-Arya 37 percent, Dalit 34 percent, Janajatis 28 percent and one percent others.

However, the demographic component is not the main reason behind the good number of Dalit students in community schools in rural areas. It has more to do with the economic condition of Dalit families. "It is an economic issue. Well-to-do families are mostly non-Dalit in the villages. Most of them have houses in the

cities as well and they prefer to keep their children there for better educational opportunities," said Karna Bahadur Nepal, a retired community school teacher. "It wouldn't have mattered which school you send your children to, but the quality of education in community schools is below par which raises questions about the future of Dalit children." Community schools in rural areas are riddled with numerous problems that deprive the students of quality education.

Ramji Devkota, the headmaster of Luyara-based Janajagrit Basic School in ward 5, admits that the school is unable to impart quality education due to the lack of resources. "The school does not even have a whiteboard. The only computer we have does not work. We have a shortage of teaching materials, printers and don't have a library," said Devkota. "We can't compete with city schools with the resources we have. We haven't been able to give the students the education they deserve." The highest average GPA of community school students who sat the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) held in April was 3.17 while the lowest was 1.71, according to the result published in July.

Aavishkar BK, Thaman BK's son, is a grade 9 student at Prithvi Narayan Secondary School in Dhampus, a tourist destination in Machhapuchchhre Rural Municipality-7. In the last academic session, 25 students appeared for SEE from Prithvi Narayan Secondary School and the average GPA was 1.95. "My son often complains that education is not good in his school. He wants to go to Pokhara and get enrolled in a private school. But I cannot afford to send him to a school in the city," said Thaman, a peasant. Prithvi Narayan Secondary School has a total of 168 students out of which 128 are from the Dalit community.

According to the Education Coordination Unit in Kaski, there are a total of 51,804 students up to grade 10 in various community schools across the district. Among them 35 percent of students are from Dalit communities, 31 are Janajatis, 28 are from Khas-Arya and six percent are from other communities. While Dalit settlements in Kaski are intact with only a small population moving out of the villages because of financial constraints, non-Dalit settlements are almost empty. This phenomenon has contributed to community schools being attended mostly by Dalit students.

"Six of every 10 houses of non-Dalit communities are empty now. The economic gap between Dalits and non-Dalits is ever-growing which leaves Dalits with fewer

choices when it comes to their children's education," said Loknath Acharya, chief of the Education Coordination Unit in Kaski. "All parents wish to give their children the best education possible, but poor families don't have that luxury."

Dalits have always ended with the short end of the stick when it comes to education, social development and economic advantages, says sociologist Bishwa Kalyan Parajuli. Their only hope at breaking free from the societal chains which tie them to poverty is a chance at a good education and the poor quality of education in community schools is depriving them of a better future, he says. The poor performance of community school students in Kaski in the SEE held in April is reflective of the quality of education students are receiving at community schools in Kaski, says Parajuli.

"Dalits did not have easy access to education until a few years ago. Since most of the students in community schools are Dalit, they are at a disadvantage because of the poor academic structure in those schools," said Parajuli. "Dalit students in the community schools affected by a shortage of means and resources are deprived of quality education. Some community schools have trained, skilled and competent teachers but most of the community schools fail to impart quality education due to weak regulatory bodies."

The class divide confines Dalit students to community schools but if the authorities are to take active responsibility to regulate community schools and provide them with more resources, the situation can be turned around, believes Parajuli. "Dalit children must have access to good education. Since their enrollment number is high in community schools, the onus now lies on the authorities to give them the best possible education in these schools."

Acharya, chief of the Education Coordination Unit in Kaski, says the unit plans to collaborate with the local bodies to improve education standards in community schools. "We will formulate a proper programme, in collaboration with the local bodies, after holding discussions on which areas to pay attention to," Acharya told the Post. "We will hold meetings with the local bodies, officers of the social development and education department and school principals and find ways to improve the quality of education in community schools in Kaski."

Source: Kathmandu Post

'Stop Killing Us': Safai Karamchari Andolan's 'Halla Bol' at Delhi's Jantar Mantar

Raj Valmiki



Women sanitation workers from across states gathered at Delhi's Jantar Mantar on Monday to challenge the government's lies in Parliament about data on deaths in sewer-septic tanks. They had only one slogan, only one demand, #STOP_KILLING_US!

It is with this slogan that the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) has launched a country-wide movement for more than a year. In this series, a protest-demonstration was organised in Delhi's Jantar Mantar on Monday.

The hundreds of women who joined the protest-demonstration were outraged over how both dalit lives and dalit deaths remain invisible for the country. The deaths in sewers and septic tanks are, in fact, caste oppression, they said, but this does not matter for "governments with casteist ideologies."

The participants included women victims and other sanitation workers from over 10 states, including Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Rajasthan and others.

Speakers in the protest demonstration said 59 Indian citizens had lost their lives in sewer-septic tanks so far this year but the government has told "white lies" in Parliament that only nine people had lost their lives. Many women victims, whose husbands lost their lives by inhaling poisonous gases in sewer-septic tanks, brought their innocent children along with them. They were angry with the government's "false statement" in Parliament.

Outraged at the government's continual denial of

the actual number of deaths, SKA had given a call for this campaign. The 'Stop Killing Us' campaign was launched on May 11, 2022 against the government's apathy toward sewer-septic tank deaths. Since then, youth, women, men and children associated with sanitation workers' groups have been demonstrating on the streets in different parts of the country every day. August 28 marked this campaign's 475th day.

SKA leader Bezwada Wilson said the government's denial of sanitation workers' deaths clearly showed their casteist mentality. "It is our 475th day running the 'Stop Killing Us' campaign but the government has not taken us seriously. These are not deaths, these are murders and we hold the government responsible for it. And till the time the government doesn't take concrete measures to stop sanitation workers' deaths, our 'Stop Killing Us' campaign will go on," he said.

The women who had lost family members in sewers or septic tanks had come with proof of their kin's deaths and their photographs, to expose the "blatant lies" of government data. They said the government's lies and apathy had further added to their suffering.

Many young men aged 18-25 have died in sewer-septic tanks. Many children who had lost their fathers were also present at JantarMantar with their mothers. A matter of grave concern is that the government has not even tried to provide justice in the form of employment, pension, housing or children's education in a single case.

Sanitation workers, both men and women, from different states spoke about their issues. It was widely felt that if the government possessed high technology to send Chandrayaan to the Moon, why doesn't it have the technology to build machines to clean sewers and septic tanks?

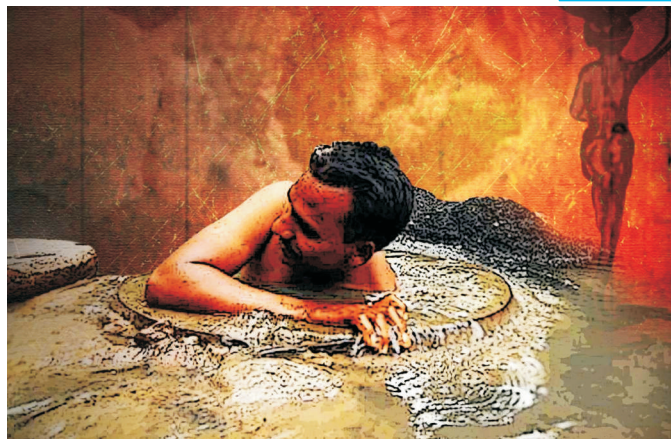
The protesters said the government fulfils its formal obligation in some rare cases by giving a compensation of Rs 10 lakh. However, everyone doesn't receive compensation and the even bigger consideration is that no compensation is equal to the value of a life. "We want that sewer and septic tank cleaning should be mechanised so that no person has to lose their life while cleaning them," said the protesters in unison.

A demand was also raised by those who lost their husbands/fathers or other family members in sewer-septic tanks, that they should be given a compensation of Rs 10 lakh along with a permanent job so that the family of the deceased can survive and their children can complete their education.

Infuriated with the government's "casteist mentality", the sanitation workers said that in the government's eyes, "the lives and deaths of us dalits do not matter. If our soldiers lose their lives at the borders, then the government expresses its concern about them. Their issues are taken seriously. But when a dalit dies while cleaning a sewer-septic tank or inhaling poisonous gases, then the government is not bothered. Why? Are these sanitation workers not citizens of the country? Don't they deserve to live a life with dignity?"

The protesters said the government presents a very progressive picture of India in other countries. It is spending money like water for cleanliness and beautification of the country for the G-20 meet. Why doesn't it rehabilitate sanitation workers and provide them dignified forms of employment?

The government has made two laws on abolishing manual scavenging, in 1993 and in 2013. If these laws are properly implemented, manual scavenging can be completely eradicated. But, these laws remain largely on paper. Sanitation workers also have the constitutional right to live their lives with



dignity, said SKA workers.

As per law, manual scavenging and manual cleaning of sewer-septic tanks cleaning have been banned and are punishable offences. There are provisions of imprisonment and fines for this offence. It is a criminal offence to coerce a sanitation worker to do manual scavenging or clean sewer-septic tanks and warrants a fine up to Rs 2 lakh and imprisonment up to two years. However, not a single offender has ever been punished in such a matter. Why?

It is worth noting that SKA has been raising the issue of the government's "wilful underreporting" of sewage cleaner workers' deaths for a long time now. This data, says SKA, is often manipulated and the government continues to release "false and misleading" statements about these deaths. "If the government, which is responsible for protecting our lives, keeps protecting criminals responsible for these deaths, then how will the casteist oppression of sewer-septic tank deaths stop?"

The key demands that sanitation workers raised are:

1. Ensure Right to Life with Dignity (Section 21).
2. Allocate a budget to end caste-based discrimination in sanitation work.
3. Ensure social and economic equality.
4. Rehabilitate sanitation workers with dignity.
5. No tolerance for sewer-septic tank deaths, among others.

A pledge to continue the 'Stop Killing Us' campaign every day till the government takes correct, concrete and satisfactory steps in this matter, was also taken in the protest-demonstration.

Jaranwala Incident: Building an Inclusive Future through Multifaceted Measures

Dr. Sahibzada Muhammad Usman



On 16 August 2023, a profoundly tragic incident unfolded in Jaranwala, a city in Pakistan's eastern Punjab province. Hundreds of people, armed with batons and sticks, swarmed churches in Jaranwala after allegations that the holy Quran was desecrated. The subsequent chaos led to the burning and vandalizing of 19 churches and at least 86 homes in the area.

The Human Rights Focus Pakistan (HRFP) confirmed that 19 churches were completely destroyed during the mayhem in the region, which experienced unprecedented levels of destruction. Since 2020, blasphemous activities have increased in Pakistan, with most cases occurring in Punjab, followed by Sindh.

Nearly all of Jaranwala's 17 churches were under attack, according to reports from the ground, including one from a local named Mukhtar, and even his home wasn't spared from the fires. Although the blasphemy claims looked to be the driving force behind the violence, it highlights a larger problem that minority populations worldwide face. The fallout from the Jaranwala event highlights the urgent need for communication, comprehension, and the defense of vulnerable populations against unjustified violence.

It is critical to go further into these core causes to comprehend better the context in which such

difficulties fester. Religious extremism is a highly intense form of religious conviction, usually characterized by adherence to a strict interpretation of religious beliefs and scriptures. Intolerant attitudes result when this rigidity clashes with more liberal or alternative interpretations. Such extremism frequently challenges the legitimacy of other religions or sects, generating an "us against them" mentality. Fundamentally, religious intolerance disregards the human right to freedom of religion. When put into practice, such intolerance can result in violent crimes committed against alleged "heretics" or "infidels," starting a vicious cycle of retaliation and widening rifts.

Sectarianism refers to hostility between different sects of a particular religion, while broader social tensions can arise from differences in ethnicity, culture, or social class. Such tensions challenge the notion of social cohesion. Differences that should ideally be celebrated become fault lines. Without proper dialogue and understanding, these tensions might escalate into large-scale conflicts. In some regions, politicians or influential figures exploit existing religious, ethnic, or social divides for personal or political gain. By inflaming these tensions, they consolidate their power base, drawing on deep-seated fears and prejudices. Exploiting such divisions for personal or political benefits undermines genuine attempts at peace and reconciliation. It's a



tactic that might offer short-term gains for some but results in long-term instability for the larger population.

Economic disparities and lack of resource access are significant drivers of social unrest. When communities feel that they are being denied basic economic rights or opportunities because of their religious or ethnic identity, it exacerbates tensions. Economic deprivation is more than just poverty; it's about lack of access to opportunities. Disenfranchised youth, in particular, may feel that radical paths offer them a sense of purpose or belonging, further fueling extremism. A weak or corrupt law enforcement apparatus can exacerbate all the previously mentioned issues. If extremist groups or individuals feel they can act with impunity, or if communities feel that the police or judiciary won't protect them, it erodes trust in the state.

While the issues of religious extremism, sectarian and social tensions, political exploitation, economic deprivation, and ineffective law enforcement might seem disparate, they are deeply interconnected. Together, they weave a tapestry of societal challenges that require multi-faceted solutions. However, when societies grapple with religious extremism, the implications are vast, multifaceted, and often profoundly damaging.

In regions marked by religious or sectarian conflict, it is common for human rights to be trampled upon. From unlawful activities and torture to the stifling of free speech and assembly, these violations become a routine rather than an exception. Minority groups suffer disproportionately from systemic prejudice and discrimination. Persistent human rights abuses create a chasm between the state and its citizens. Not only does

this erode the principles upon which modern societies are built, but it also perpetuates a cycle of mistrust and resentment. This cycle is a nurturing ground for additional unrest, as affected communities feel isolated and marginalized.

As a result of the rise of religious extremism and violence, many individuals are compelled to leave their homes in quest of safety. Displacement might be internal, with people moving to safer regions within their own country, or international, as they seek refuge in foreign lands. Displacement creates several challenges. On an individual level, the trauma of leaving one's home and the uncertainty of the future can be debilitating. On a societal level, large-scale displacement strains the resources and infrastructures of hosting areas or countries. Moreover, as history shows, displacement can lead to "lost generations" - children who grow up in refugee camps without access to proper education or a sense of belonging.

Religious extremism and societal unrest have profound economic implications. Businesses shut down due to fear, investors pull out due to uncertainty, and trade often halts in conflict zones. The longer the unrest persists, the more deeply entrenched these economic woes become. Economic downturns in impoverished areas can lead to famine, increased poverty rates, and a lack of basic services. Moreover, a weakened economy often pushes the youth towards criminal activities or radical groups, offering them a semblance of purpose or financial reward. Over time, a once prosperous region can be caught in a trap of economic stagnation and increasing crime.

When societal tensions flare, especially those rooted in

religious differences, interfaith relations are among the first casualties. Centuries of coexistence can be overshadowed by a few years, or even months, of conflict. Deteriorated interfaith relations can take generations to mend. Trust, once broken, is hard to rebuild. In its absence, societies become fragmented, with communities leading isolated lives in enclaves. This isolation often perpetuates myths and mistrust, making reconciliation efforts even more challenging. Moreover, a society devoid of interfaith harmony misses the rich cultural and intellectual exchange that diverse communities bring.

Nations experiencing internal strife often become targets for external powers with vested interests. These hostile nations might support radical groups, further fueling the unrest, or manipulate the situation to serve their geopolitical goals. External interference often prolongs conflicts and makes resolutions more complicated. With foreign powers pulling strings, the unrest might shift from an internal issue to a proxy war, with the affected nation caught in the crossfire of more giant geopolitical games. Additionally, the influence of hostile countries can undermine genuine efforts for peace by internal stakeholders, as they are now viewed with suspicion.

The way forward:

Law enforcement agencies are the first line of defense against societal unrest. Their primary responsibility is to maintain order, protect citizens, and ensure that justice is meted out fairly and promptly. It's imperative to continuously train law enforcement officers, not just in combat techniques, but in conflict resolution, community engagement, and cultural sensitivity. This ensures they approach issues holistically rather than just law and order problems. Harnessing technology, like surveillance systems and data analytics, can help law enforcement agencies preempt potential issues and respond swiftly when they arise. Regular audits, body-worn cameras, and public reports can make law enforcement agencies more transparent, ensuring they retain the public's trust and confidence.

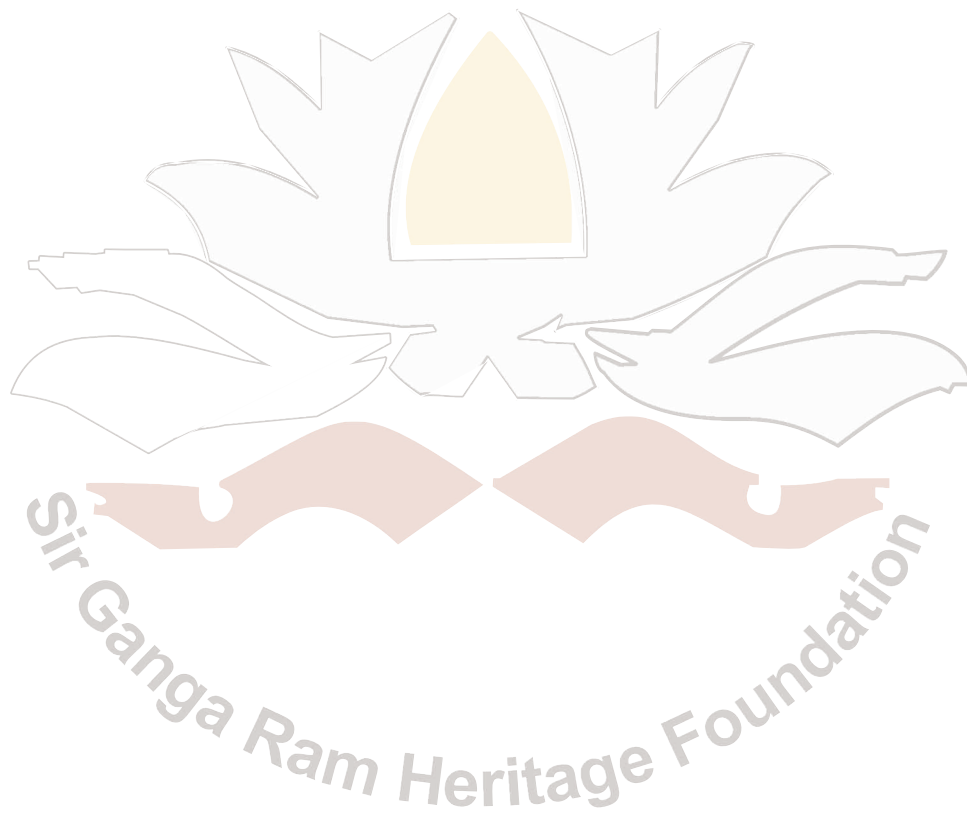
Education plays a pivotal role in shaping mindsets. A well-informed and educated populace is likelier to shun religious extremism and embrace diversity. Education systems must emphasize inclusive curricula that celebrate diversity and teach the values of tolerance, understanding, and coexistence. In an age of rampant misinformation, there's a dire need for educational programs that teach critical thinking and digital literacy,

enabling individuals to discern facts from falsehoods. Beyond formal education, continuous learning opportunities can be provided to adults, ensuring they remain adaptable and open-minded in a rapidly changing world.

At the heart of any society are its communities. Engaging them means ensuring that every individual feels valued, heard, and involved in shaping their collective future. Platforms should be created where community members can discuss their concerns, aspirations, and grievances openly. Such dialogues can break barriers and build bridges among different community factions. Law enforcement agencies can foster trust and rapport with communities by regularly engaging with them, understanding their dynamics, and involving them in policing strategies. By empowering communities through skill development, entrepreneurial training, and self-help groups, societies can ensure that individuals feel invested in their community's well-being and progress.

True change is realized when political leadership not only acknowledges the challenges but is also committed to addressing them head-on. Political leadership must be willing to overhaul outdated policies that might be contributing to societal unrest and replace them with progressive ones that prioritize harmony and development. Engaging with the global community can bring in fresh perspectives, resources, and expertise to address domestic challenges. Collaborative efforts can be particularly effective in countering issues like extremism that often have transnational roots. Governments should shift their focus towards welfare-driven models, ensuring that every citizen, regardless of background, has access to basic amenities, healthcare, education, and opportunities. This can significantly reduce the sense of marginalization that often fuels unrest.

The church-burning incidents underscore the urgent need for comprehensive efforts to address the issue. The journey towards a harmonious and prosperous society is a continuous process, requiring concerted efforts across multiple domains. While challenges will persist, with a strong emphasis on law enforcement, education, community engagement, and political will, societies can lay a robust foundation for peace and prosperity. Only by recognizing and embracing these multifaceted approaches can communities hope to move beyond unrest and disparities, charting a path toward an inclusive, vibrant, and harmonious future.



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