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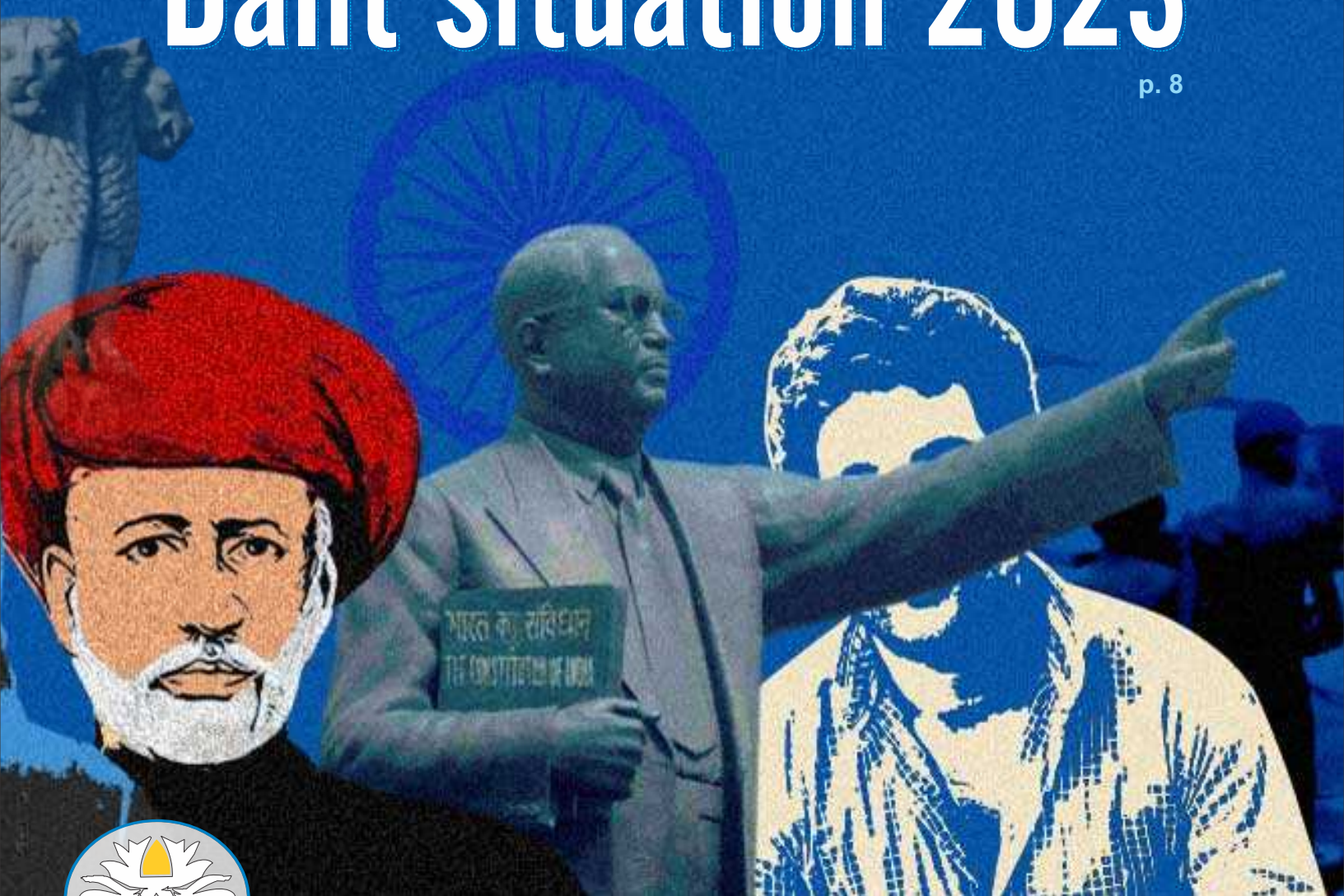


Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies



Untouchability and exclusion, absence of voice:  
**Dalit situation 2023**

p. 8



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# MINO-VIEW

## Quarterly Magazine

Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in  
South Asian Societies

### **Editor:**

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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.

### **Contact:**

Editor,

Ph: +92 42 37115810

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





## Editorial

Welcome to the latest issue of "Mino-View". In a significant development, Oxford University has formally recognized "caste" as a protected characteristic, following a resolution passed by the Oxford University and College Union (UCU). This decision marks a crucial milestone in the ongoing global efforts to address caste discrimination within academic settings. On the other side in India, students at Delhi's Ashoka University's Social Justice Forum have requested the university's administration to launch an online petition for a comprehensive caste census due to incidents of discriminatory behavior on campus going unaccounted for due to the absence of a formal reporting body. A report by International Christian Concern (ICC) has highlighted the deteriorating religious freedom conditions for Christians and other religious minorities in India led by the party currently in power. The report suggests several policy recommendations to the U.S. Government to address these issues as it has taken a soft line with the Indian government on human rights. Similarly in Nepal, the abolition of the monarchy in 2006 has led to increased mobility and representation for Dalits in administration, but casteism still exists in society, particularly in rural areas. While there have been legal reforms to address caste-based discrimination, implementation remains a challenge. Caste practices have shifted in urban areas, but people still find pretexts to commit caste-based atrocities. Nepal's interim constitution of 2007 provided for 40% seats from the first-past-the-post system and 60% from the proportional voting system, which was more inclusive for Dalits, but the 2015 Constitution established a federal system with a mixed electoral system that reversed this arrangement and undermined the reservation system. To address underrepresentation of Dalits in the reservation system, a fair allocation of seats is imperative based on their population. While many social reformers and activists have enabled Dalit assertion and awareness, much needs to be done to secure their rights. Emerging artists, civil rights activists and activists have enabled Dalits parliament provide some hope to promote an inclusive society. The situation is not very different while comparing minority populations in the US and India, focusing on demographics, community living, riots and their own communities, but US is moving towards greater inclusivity and reparations, while India is becoming more nationalistic and exclusionary. Crimes against minority populations have raised in India and Bangladesh, with conviction rates are remarkably very low varying by state. Therefore, recognizing and banning the caste is not the only solution to the problem, it requires changing the mindset of the people in which international human rights organizations and institutions like the United Nations can play a very key role.

# ICC Releases Report on Concerning Trends in India

International Christian Concern (ICC) released a report outlining the concerning religious freedom conditions for Christians and other religious minorities in India. As India recently celebrated its 76th anniversary of its independence on August 15, the country is further from its roots as a secular democracy than ever. Led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing religious nationalist party, India is moving rapidly to restrict the rights of religious minorities across the country.

Legally, the rise of anti-conversion laws criminalizes minority religious expression by making it illegal to convert or attempt to convert, members of another faith. In practice, Christians and Muslims are the ones charged under these laws. Acts as innocuous as talking about heaven or offering snacks after a church service fall afoul of the laws, with enhanced sentences mandated in cases involving more than one person, a woman, a child or a member of the many protected ethnic or caste communities.

Other legal barriers, like those barring Christians and Muslims from social welfare schemes, also serve to chill religious freedom. Socially, Hindu nationalism restricts freedom across India by fueling mob violence against Christians and Muslims. ICC's report considers the recent outbreak of violence

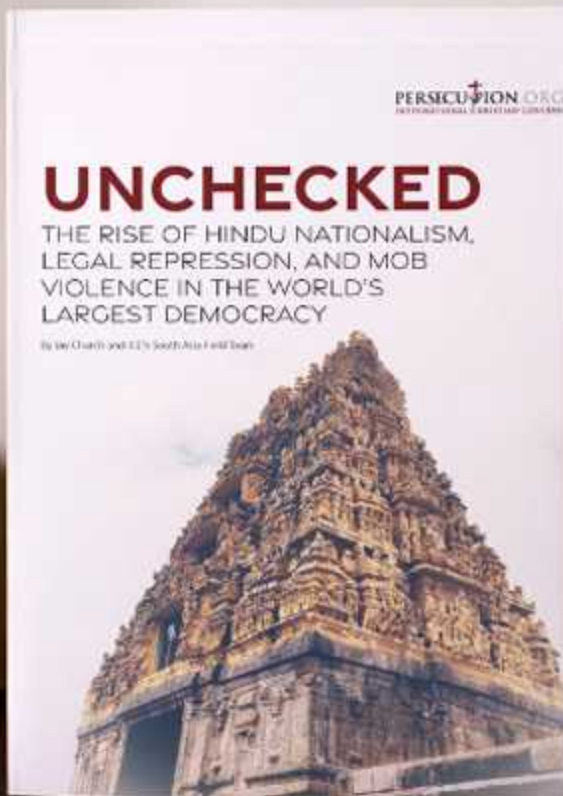
against Christians in Chhattisgarh and the ongoing ethno religious violence happening in Manipur. Both instances are instructive not only to the state of religious freedom in India but the Indian government's lackluster response and its refusal to extend substantive protections to its religious minority population.

This report also suggests several policy recommendations to the U.S. government, which has, for decades, taken a soft line with the Indian government on human rights. Its priority, it

**ICC's report considers the recent outbreak of violence against Christians in Chhattisgarh and the ongoing ethno religious violence happening in Manipur. Both instances are instructive not only to the state of religious freedom in India but the Indian government's lackluster response and its refusal to extend substantive protections to its religious minority population**

would seem, is to woo what it considers to be an important geopolitical ally in its fight against growing Chinese global influence around the world. Though the U.S. does highlight India's religious freedom issues on occasion, it is not consistent in its messaging and has thus far chosen to avoid the most potent tools at its disposal.

*Source: Persecution*



# Oxford University Union Adds Caste to Protected Category

Pratikshit Singh



In a ground breaking development at Oxford University, a significant stride towards inclusivity has been achieved as the institution formally recognizes "caste" as a protected characteristic. This historic decision, passed by the Oxford University and College Union (UCU), marks a crucial milestone in the ongoing global efforts to address caste discrimination within academic settings.

As the South Asian population in the United Kingdom increases, caste discrimination is a growing issue on college and university campuses across the country. With more Indians choosing to study in the UK, students from marginalized communities face caste divisions that operate covertly.

The prestigious Oxford University became another premier institution to add caste to the list of protected categories. According to a post on the Oxford South Asian forum, "We are thrilled to announce that @OxfordUCU has passed a resolution recognizing 'caste' as a protected characteristic."

The University and College Union, which represents more than 120,000 academics and support staff, approved the motion to add caste as a protected category. The November meeting of the union, held on 23rd, aimed at supporting negotiations and discussions with Oxford University regarding an "anti-caste

discrimination framework."

Giving further details regarding this development, the thread by Oxford South Asian Ambedkar forum read, "UCU Oxford will support us in their negotiations and discussions with Oxford University regarding their 'anti-caste discrimination' framework. We will meet with the UCU Regional Forum to discuss meaningful changes to anti-discriminatory guidance. However, before Oxford, the Student Union of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies London had recognized caste as a protected category.

## **International Universities Increasingly Recognizing Caste as a Protected Category**

December 2019: Brandeis University, a private research university in Massachusetts, became the first American university to prohibit caste discrimination. "Brandeis University celebrates the diversity of its faculty, staff, students and alumni. It is in this spirit that the institution seeks to effectively address the concept of caste and its corresponding identity-based lived experience within our policy on non-discrimination." Read the statement released by the University.

November 2021: The University of California, Davis, codified the social system of caste as a protected category under its anti-discrimination policy.





December 2021: Harvard became the first Ivy League university to recognize caste-based discrimination as an issue of concern after Harvard Graduate Student Union ratified a four-year contract that includes a provision for the addition of caste as a “protected category” for all graduate and undergraduate student workers at the university.

December 2022: Brown University, based in the United States, became another Ivy League institution to ban discrimination based on caste.

April 2023: Rutgers University of New Jersey provided safeguard against caste-based discrimination to its faculties and students. In April 2023, Columbia University, the alma mater of Baba Saheb Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, added caste as a protected category following the efforts of Vikas Tatad, who holds a key position of student representative.

Besides this, various schools and departments across universities in the United States have also added caste to their discrimination policy. For example, four schools in the University of Minnesota have added caste to their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion criteria. The Toronto School Board in Canada became the first school board to acknowledge the existence of caste in school boards.

Earlier this year, Oxford University, one of the

most prestigious universities in the world, launched the Savitri-bai-Phule graduate scholarship for Bahujan students. Niharika Singh from Lucknow became the first recipient of the scholarship.

*Source: Mooknayak*



**"Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind."**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

# High Crime Rate, Low Convictions: A Snapshot of SC, ST Atrocities in 5 Years

Himanshi Dahiya

Cases of crimes against people belonging to communities in the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) categories have risen progressively and steadily between the years 2018 and 2022, according to figures by the National Crime Records Bureau.

These include crimes such as murder, assault on women, sexual harassment, stalking, kidnapping and assault of children among others.

The NCRB - a government agency responsible for collecting and analysing crime data - released its latest report on 4 December.

This report, in 10 charts, looks at what the crime rate, charge-sheeting rate and conviction rate across states tell us about atrocities against vulnerable caste demographics.

## UP, MP, Rajasthan, Odisha Lead The Charts in 2022

As per the 2022 numbers, Uttar Pradesh (UP) with 15,368 cases recorded the highest total cases of atrocities against people from the SC category. Rajasthan with 8,752 cases stood second, whereas Madhya Pradesh (MP) with 7,733 cases was on number three.

It must, however, be noted that the crime rate (crime per lakh population) in Rajasthan was 71.6 - more than double that of UP which recorded a crime rate of 37.2. At the same time, Rajasthan's charge-sheeting rate was 45.9 percent, which means that a chargesheet was filed in only 45.9

percent of recorded cases. In UP, charge-sheeting rate stood at 84.9 percent.

A comparison of conviction rate also showed that while Rajasthan saw only 39.5 percent convictions, in UP, the rate was 80.2 percent.

MP recorded a high crime rate (68.2) and high charge-sheeting rate (99.5 percent) but the conviction rate remained low (22.9 percent).

Most cases of atrocities against people belonging to the ST category were recorded in MP (2,979) followed by Rajasthan (2,521) and Odisha (773).

While MP and Odisha, 99.8 and 94.9 percent respectively, saw high charge-sheeting rates, Rajasthan's charge-sheeting rate remained low at 44.3 percent.

## 2018-2022: The Overall Figures

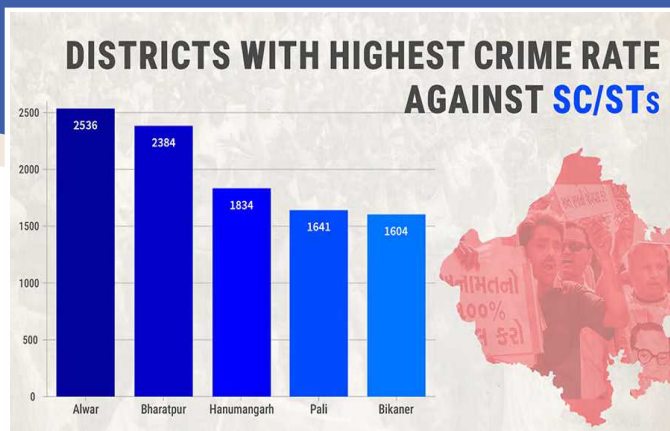
An analysis of NCRB data from 2018 to 2022 suggests that the conviction rates in crimes against people belonging to the SC and ST categories saw a spike in years before and after the Lok Sabha elections.

For instance, the conviction rate in crimes against SCs went up from 28.5 percent in 2018 to 32.1 percent in 2019 and 42.4 percent in 2020. The rate then dropped to 36 percent in 2021 and 34 percent in 2022.

This while the number of cases steadily increased from 42,793 cases in 2018 to 57,582 cases in 2022.







The crime rate in this period also went up from 21.6 to 28.6.

In cases related to atrocities against people belonging to the ST category, conviction rate went up from 23.5 percent in 2018 to 26.4 percent in 2019 and then went up to 28.5 percent in 2020.

It then plateaued at 28.1 percent while crime rate went up from 6.3 percent in 2018 to 8.4 percent in 2021 and 9.6 percent in 2022.

#### 2018-2022: State-wise Data For Crime Against SCs

Over the last five years, UP, Rajasthan and MP consistently recorded highest cases of atrocities against SCs. The crime rate in all the three states saw a steady increase.

In UP, it went up from 28.8 in 2018 to 37.2 in 2022. The conviction rate also increased steadily from 55 percent in 2018 to 80.2 percent in 2022.

Rajasthan performed poorly in terms of charge-sheeting and conviction rates. While crime rate went up from 37.7 in 2018 to 71.6 in 2022, the conviction rate dropped from 43.6 percent in 2018 to 39.5 percent in 2022.

The conviction rate increased marginally in 2019 went up to 51.1 percent.

MP, also in line with trends seen in other states, saw a conviction in less than one-third of the charge-sheeted cases. While the crime rate went up from 41.9 in 2018 to 68.2 in 2022.



Despite a high charge-sheeting rate (above 99 percent in all five years), conviction remained abysmally low. It went up from 28.8 percent in 2018 to 31.5 percent in 2019 to 40.1 percent in 2020. Then, it dipped to 28 percent in 2021 and to 22.9 percent in 2022.

#### 2018-2022: State-wise Data For Crimes Against STs

Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Odisha were the most unsafe states for people belonging to ST category as they recorded maximum cases of atrocities between 2018 and 2022.

In MP, the crime rate went up from 12.2 in 2018 to 19.4 in 2022. The conviction rate remained low fluctuating between 34 percent in 2018 and 35.9 percent in 2022. It marginally increased from 31.3 percent in 2019 to 35.9 percent in 2020.

Rajasthan also saw a drastic rise in crime rate against STs as it spiked from 11.9 in 2018 to 27.3 in 2022. In the same period, the charge sheeting rate remained low with a charge-sheet being registered in only close to 50 percent cases. The conviction rate despite rising steadily, remained low.

Odisha, which has a tribal population of close to 22.84 percent, saw a zero conviction rate in 2019, 2020 and 2021. While the crime rate went up from 5.8 in 2018 to 8.1 in 2022. The charge sheeting rate remained high with a chargesheet being registered in more than 90 percent cases.

Source: *The Quint*

# It's time to ensure Hindu women's legal rights in Bangladesh



**Inequality for women in Bangladesh is more of a social issue than a legal one. With the exception of personal matters, inequalities in the implementation of the law are hardly ever noticed. Hindu law, which is the oldest law in existence, greatly varies, adapts, or changes. With the exception of fundamental instruments, different schools have varied ways of explaining them.**

Bangladesh is dedicated to establishing equality on the basis of gender, caste and other factors as a signatory to a number of international agreements. In addition to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), unquestionably the most significant international treaty pertaining to women, Bangladesh is a party to a number of other agreements that uphold the ideal of gender equality, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Bangladesh has reservations about some provisions in each of the above treaties. Bangladesh opposed CEDAW Articles 2 and 16(1) (c). If the preceding is interpreted grammatically, it is possible that it would not be inaccurate to suggest that even if the rules of other communities are taken into consideration, Article 2 will still be obligatory.

Bangladesh has a reservation to Article 16 (1) (c) which requires the state to provide "the same rights and duties throughout marriage and at the moment of its dissolution." Bangladesh hasn't adopted it but supports the rest of Article 16. Article 16 requires state parties to end all marital and family discrimination against women. These include

Article 16 (1) (b), which addresses the issue of free and full consent to marriage; Article 16 (1) (d), which addresses the issue of having the same rights and responsibilities as parents; and Article 16 (1) (f), regarding which Bangladesh had reservations in the past and later removed.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child has these provisions. Bangladesh must also take all appropriate measures under CEDAW Article 5(a). Bangladesh disputes ICESCR Articles 2 and 3. These articles concern implementing the accord. State parties must "ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of the economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant," under Article 3. In the case of the ICCPR, Bangladesh has not denied the provisions of Article 23 even though it has expressed reservations about a number of the articles which are as follows:

- Society and the state must defend the family - society's most natural and fundamental social unit.
- The ability of people of legal marriageable age to wed and have families should be recognised as a fundamental human right.
- There shall be no marriage entered into without the free and complete agreement of both of the individuals who desire to wed.
- States this Covenant requires the parties to ensure the equality of rights and duties of spouses during and after marriage. If the marriage ends, the children will be protected.
- When considering the situation vis-a-vis the caste system, even the Sreemadvagabhad Geeta, the sacred religious book of the Hindu people, it is mentioned that the Caste system will be based on his/her ability and virtue and not by birth.

According to the Parashara Sanghita, a Hindu Woman can marry a second time and the first marriage will be dissolved on five grounds. However, the Law Commission did not codify those grounds in line with the Shastra. Unlike the marriage registration process, the concerned authorities remain silent regarding the divorce registration process. In considering the present circumstances, it needs to adopt a divorce registration policy.

Bangladeshi Hindu law prohibits divorce. Hindu law in Bangladesh forbids divorce unless local tradition allows it, which might be difficult to prove. On the other hand, the Parashara Sanghita allows it providing that "Another husband is ordained for women in five troubles."

These are: If the husband is unheard of, dead, has adopted a religious order, is impotent and lastly becomes out-casted.

A Hindu woman in Bangladesh has the right to claim separate residence and maintenance if she satisfies certain criteria, many of which are similar to those outlined in the Act of 1946.

Even the sacred Veda does not discriminate against adoption for both males and females. It says that "the parents give birth to children; son & daughter. One for the filial rites and duties for themselves & family; the other as beneficiary of the sanctities and accomplishments.

In Bangladeshi law, which is largely un-codified, women, regardless of whether they are daughters or widows (or widows when there are many surviving spouses), continue to have limited estate rights, sometimes known as restricted inheritance rights. But Vedic Shastriya law says that women as well as daughters also have the right to inherit property.

According to Manu Smriti, chapter 9, verse 131; a female can get Stridhan in six ways. These are Adhyagni, Adhyabahonic, Priti-karma, from her father, her mother and lastly her brother.

A verse of Yagnavalkya Smriti mentions that after



the death of the husband, the widow will get an equal share as the son. For instance, if a deceased has three sons then the property will be distributed into four parts. The sons will get three portions and the mother/widow will get one portion.

In Bangladesh, a girl is not eligible for an inheritance if there is a male in the family. Only in the event that there are no sons and only in the event that there is a widow or widows does the daughter inherit.

If the daughter is unmarried and if she stays in ancestry (father's house) then she will not be deprived of getting property. According to Manu Sanghita, the brother will be bound to give one-fourth of the whole property. If the deceased leaves behind a widow, then the brother and unmarried sister will get an equal share.

But Bangladesh still applies the British-made law with a few exceptions, namely; Hindu Marriage Registration Act, 2012. Narad Smriti mentions that if there is any conflict or dissimilarities between the verses of Smriti shastra then it can be sorted out through logical arguments and discussion.

In these circumstances, the Law Commission proposed new rules and regulations in 2006 but was unable to implement them. Since Bangladesh is a dualist country, any law enacted should adhere to international obligations. The concerned authority should codify new rules and regulations with proper references to Vedic Shastriya Law, while keeping in mind international obligations.

*Source: TBS News*



# Untouchability and exclusion, absence of voice: Dalit situation 2023

"People are celebrating the Amrit Mahotsav of Azadi, it's been 75 years, but we still lag so far behind. There has not been an Indian Dalit woman editor in India ever. This should be a source of sharmindagi that we have had to wait for so long." Meena Kotwal, the founding editor of Mooknayak talks about the state of Indian media. This statement, from CJP's interview with Meena Kotwal stands as a testament to the persistent presence of caste in India. As 2023 ends, this essay brings to you reflections by Dalit individuals as they look back at how they chart their personal journey as well as that of Indian society in the 21st century.

Sanjeev Sonpimpare, an artist based in Mumbai, reflects on the bias in reportage about the Dalit community and observes what big media tactically refuses to cover. "Atrocities against Dalits are happening every day, everyone is aware about this. Every person from the community experiences it. What is worse is the mainstream media's response, which is completely biased. For instance, it will not cover Bahujan's events and celebrations, such as the Mahaparinirwan Diwas (on December 6), or Ambedkar Jayanti on April 14. My work as an artist is based on Ambedkarite thought and ideology. Through my work, I deal with social issues surrounding caste and capitalism, basic rights and social justice."

Similarly, it seems that India's esteemed institutes are also not immune or completely sensitised from preventing violence against Dalits. Jyoti, name changed, is a young student from a government university reflects on these questions and says "Caste system pretty much exists in all spaces, even the so called political and progressive spaces. For instance, I know of a student at my university, a doctoral student, who was discriminated against for drinking water in the hostel. She was not

allowed to use the water cooler. Even a simple, fundamental part of life, such as drinking water becomes laden with caste. Even Babasaheb was prevented from drinking water..." When asked about everyday violence, "yes, this is an issue. Our social media are saturated with everyday violence, especially against Dalit women; it is an endless barrage of statistics, that is all that one sees in the media, endless violence against Dalit bodies. It is exasperating and can be overwhelming. Furthermore, what is interesting is that the media often prefers to focus on these violent incidents as well and reduces Dalits to that, as if Dalit persons are defined by nothing but violence. This is a propaganda, I feel, which is casteist in nature."


Thus, from Jyoti's narratives we can see that caste continues to function in the everyday with taboos, based on notions of purity and pollution, as it is seamlessly woven in everyday practices from universities to media houses. Structural barriers provided by caste not only impede access to justice but also exacerbate existing social and economic disparities, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage for Dalit communities.

A survey conducted by the SC/ST Students' Cell at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay was reported by the Indian Express, highlights caste as a "central reason" behind the mental health challenges faced by students from reserved categories on campus. The survey was conducted in June of 2022 and revealed that nearly one-fourth of the SC/ST students involved experienced mental health issues. Additionally, 7.5% of them grappled with "acute mental health problems and exhibited a tendency for self-harm."

How do intersectional identities such as gender and caste interact? CJP spoke to an Uttar Pradesh based activist







named Mamta who has been working as an activist for many years. Prior to this she worked as a teacher for several years, too. She proudly states that now she is known as a Dalit mahila activist. Talking about her work, she narrates, "I take up issues of people who are often from the most vulnerable of social groups." Discussing the particular vulnerability women from marginalised communities face, she says, "If your economic condition is not great you will face even more issues and problems." Many of these affected people are women, who face issues at home with domestic violence and other issues. Many of these women," she says, "are forced to work jobs day in and out and in that process, their children end up alone and neglected at home." On asked how she herself managed having a family while at the same time working as an activist, "It is very difficult. I am often told that I am on my own. Especially if there are emergency cases where I may have to venture out at night after receiving a call, I am told that I have chosen this so I have to do this on my own." Life is not easy for Mamta who, in her own words, argues that she faces the double burden of gender and caste as she navigates her life.

Structural violence against Dalit people and other marginalised groups puts them at vulnerable spots where they are prone to violence. CJP Mr Sumedh Jadhav, a Maharashtra based anti-caste activist and trade unionist who has worked with the Dalit Panthers for over 50 years, delved into the vision and ideals that have centred, talked about Maharashtra has been plagued with Casteism, from riots and violence in every village to large scale anti-Dalit violence in 1974.

The Dalit Panthers was a revolutionary social and political movement which emerged in Maharashtra. In 1974, Mumbai saw the Worli Riots where those who attended bore the brunt of police repression in assaulting Dalits. On January 10, 1974, during a protest rally, a stone was flung from a building by Shiv Sainiks in the vicinity of Parel Railway workshop. This incident took the life of Mr Jadhav's brother, Shaheed Bhagwat Jadhav and he became a martyr. Mr Jadhav talks about how he lost his brother, Shaheed Bhagwat Jadhav. Mr Jadhav details how the organisation focussed on providing legal assistance to victims of anti-Dalit violence in the state, "After an act of violence, the family is left emotionally derailed and morally lost, to take up legal hurdles. This is where our work became pivotal, as we would step in and assist those families who faced violence and provide them legal help in courts and beyond. The work of the casteist and communal forces over the years has been to divide the nation and its social fabric, this is something we fight against."

Asked about whether in 2023, how he looks back to the changes that have come about, Mr Jadhav states that not much has changed. However, he stands resolute in his stance that he will continue to struggle and fight against casteist forces. With a vision towards the future, Mr Jadhav talks about how on January 10, 2024 would be his brother Shaheed Bhagwat Jadhav's 50 years death anniversary, "We will be organising a grand programme with politicians from across the spectrum. We operate with the vision of Babasaheb's constitution and its values and firmly believe in the fight against the forces that seek to weaken the constitution."

Instances of reported violence against ST/SC persons have reportedly increased over the years. While viewers hear of it mostly from their screens or through newspaper, Advocate Dular who spoke to CJP provides a closer view at the harrowing reality about how existing mechanisms for justice are not functional for Dalit people as those that implement these provisions often belong to the same caste and ideology as those individuals who attacks Dalits. Identifying as Dalit human rights defender Advocate Ram Dular has been working for human rights in Uttar Pradesh for the past 20-25 years. He is currently based in Varanasi. "The situation for Dalits is extremely grave. There are mass attacks on Dalits. You can see about the latest incident in Kanpur." Adv. Dular is referring to the incident where a group of upper castes came and attacked people celebrating Buddha Katha in Kanpur. "Why can't one celebrate Buddha Katha, or the religion they want? It is a fundamental right."

Drawing light to the media, he highlights that the media does not "follow up" on these cases and covers a limited number of incidents related to Dalits. "It only covers issues tagged as "Hindu-Muslim" violence, including Dalits under those they consider as Hindu - although ST/SCs have never been Hindu in reality. Casteist fundamentalism is really fuelled by the soch and vicharhara (ideology) where upper castes think they can do anything to Dalit people. Now, these actions are being done openly. They have become nidar (fearless) in their actions. The government is not doing anything to curb it. Just recently, I heard of a case where a minor Dalit boy was beaten so badly and received internal injuries. He was brought home but he didn't speak or do anything. Later when he was taken to the hospital, he died of the injuries he sustained by the attack. The boy's family filed an FIR but the FIR was not registered for murder, it was only registered under section 506 of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 which is only a complaint against having received threat



to murder. So in these cases we see that the survivors even face various hurdles in filing FIRs and getting justice. So you can see the police also participate in this and they do so because they share the same soch, background and ideology as the attackers. This is an issue of the system which is biased.”

Citing an incident, Adv. Dular narrates how he tried to diligently make the process of accessing a lawyer easier for survivors of anti-Dalit violence by trying to make sure that provisions by the Prevention of Atrocities Act were implemented at the local level, “I sent over 25-30 applications to the Zila Parishad, SDM, Tehsil officers for the implementation of the provision that states that any private lawyer hired by the family of the victim can be turned into a public prosecutor by the District Magistrate.” This implementation, he says, would ensure that the family does not have to make ends meet to pay lawyers' fees and the lawyer they hire would be adequately compensated, however, he says, “No action was taken. He even sent letters to officials higher up urging them to ensure the district level administration takes action, but they instead replied saying that he should approach the district level,” and putting the request at a seemingly endless loop. This serves to illustrate his words that there really is a systemic apathy and biased demeanour of the justice system (against Dalits).”

These words remind us of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's final address to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949. He talked about the necessity for a social democracy rather than confining efforts solely to political dimensions, “Political Democracy cannot last unless their lies at the base Social Democracy.” Ambedkar's commitment to social democracy remains a guiding and relevant sight, especially in light of the fact that despite India functioning as a democracy, Dalits, even those in the higher echelons of power, face discrimination and injustice. For instance, in September this year, Kerala's Minister for SC/ST Welfare, K Radhakrishnan, shared his personal experience of encountering caste discrimination during a temple function in the Kannur district of Kerala. Aghast and shocked, he spoke to the media and emphasised the urgent need for a profound shift in the mind-set that perpetuates such discriminatory practices. This incident reveals that even Dalits in positions of power are not immune to the pervasive impact of structural violence.

According to a report by Deccan Herald, a survey by OXFAM - Newslaundry reported the dismal representation of Dalit and marginalised castes in India

and detailed that 90% of the leadership positions in “mainstream” media are occupied by General caste individuals.

Thus, narratives of power, discrimination and strength seem to persevere. CJP spoke to Meena Kotwal, one of India's foremost journalists who is the founding editor of The Mooknayak, who talked to us about her role as a journalist in bringing change and instituting a new media platform, Mooknayak, to bring change into people's lives and being “too vocal” a Dalit for existing media houses. Referring to her time and subsequent departure from BBC India, Kotwal had spoken in public and highlighted the casteism she had faced on account of being a Dalit woman. She talks to CJP, narrating about having worked as a freelance journalist in various media outlets after leaving the BBC, saying that the position of Dalit journalists in media publications as freelancers especially is extremely precarious. “They have very difficult future prospects, they are not included in decision-making processes and if anyone is a vocal Dalit, like me, they will not be given a job at all. Following my time as a freelancer, I even started working without remuneration,”

However, that did not bode well for the journalist, she narrates how she faced vulnerabilities on account of gender and caste both. However, she argues that her heart did not want to settle, “Mann nahi lag raha tha. Existing media did not want to accept the kind of stories I would want to do. This made me very angry. It was January of 2020 and in my anger and fury, I formed The Mooknayak, on 31st January 2021. Dr Ambedkar too, seeing how ignorant Indian media was at the time to concerns and issues of the Dalit people, had formed The Mooknayak on the very same day. So, it got me thinking, why should I not revive it again? I decided to form The Mooknayak which would focus on caste and gender in particular. Initially I started it alone. But gradually, we were 5 people, then more and more joined.”

Talking about the toil put in the work of journalism, she says, “I was working very hard. I thought then, why not work hard for stories I believe are necessary. In India, despite it being the place where caste has originated, there is not enough work done on caste. Research and journalism on caste is happening in countries such as the US and UK, but not India.”

On being asked what is rewarding about her pioneering efforts in media, she says, “I don't find this being rewarding in the sense that we should have had these initiatives long back. People are celebrating the Amrit



Mahotsav of Azadi, it's been 75 years, but we still lag so far behind. There has not been an Indian Dalit woman editor in India ever," until of course, Kotwal took up the helm herself, marking a shift in what it means to be Dalit in media, "This should be a source of sharmindagi that we have had to wait for so long. There is nothing rewarding about this. It is something we lack." Further discussing how international media has covered and been in contact with The Mooknayak more than domestic media, a fact that can be attributed to casteism, Kotwal talks about how domestic media fails to pay attention.

Talking about the momentous impact of The Mooknayak, she narrates that, "Our stories bring change. Due to coverage and reportage, if a person is getting access to electricity or water, improves food quality - or even is able to file an FIR, because it is become extremely dangerous and difficult for survivors to file an FIR in cases of SC/ST atrocities, I would say that is monumental impact by The Mooknayak. I am not here to change the government. Governments come and governments go, the situation of Dalits continues to remain the same even as time passes across decades. I believe small issues constitute a big change. If Mooknayak is able to bring these changes, it is something, I believe, that has a lasting, long term impact."

Citing NCRB statistics, Kotwal states that crimes against Dalits have risen, "These are only the instances that are reported." Thus, she observes how the condition of caste persists despite government promises over the years, thereby reiterating her belief in bringing changes in everyday experiences to be a source of lasting change. Meena Kotwal herself was subjected to casteist violence and even faced initial difficulty in filing an FIR against these instances after she released a photo on Twitter, now X, of burning the Manusmriti on December 25. Babasaheb Ambedkar had also burned the Manusmriti on December 25, Kotwal reminded us during the conversation, during the Mahad Satyagraha which was a struggle for Dalits to achieve access to public drinking water. He strongly believed that the Manusmriti was an anti-social text and thus the day he burned it is regarded as the Manusmriti Dahan Diwas, he has explained the burning of the text saying that he was convinced that the Manusmriti did not even remotely support the idea of social equality.

One figure, revered as an ideologue by Hindutva organisations, was known for his casteist views. M. S. Golwalkar who attempted to justify the Varna system to a modern audience and asserted that it served as a means to coordinate between different societal divisions, thus

making the practice of caste a palatable practice for modern Indians. Golwalkar bemoaned the supposed benefits of the caste system and contended that this system, based on hereditary functions, facilitated individuals in serving society according to their "inherent" capabilities. Yet despite Golwalkar's attempt to portray the Varna system as a harmonious division of labour, the harsh reality for Dalits has been marked by systemic exclusions and taboos and can never be fit within a modern system or theory. One of the most acute forms of discrimination revolves around everyday practices such as eating, where Dalits have historically faced severe restrictions, often being forced into separate spaces or denied access altogether. Moreover, access to basic resources like water has been marred by caste-based discrimination, with Dalits encountering barriers in fetching water from community sources. While the nation continues to stand in the shadow of the horrifyingly brutal rape and murder of a young Dalit girl in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras, the reality is that these incidents are the norm. The notion of "contamination" and the stigmatisation of Dalits in the name of scriptures have perpetuated deeply ingrained prejudices. Golwalkar's speech in Ahmedabad in December 1960, as reported in Organiser in January 1961, reflects the far-right Hindutva's use of ideological justifications for violently enforcing hierarchical norms.

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The RSS seeks to unite India to a pan-Hindu nation-state, but scholars, writers and activists have questioned the attempts by RSS to include it in its ambit of Hindu. Bhanwar Meghanshi, spoke to CJP in his eloquent but clear manner of speaking, putting to words his journey as an author offering a Dalit perspective from within India's largest organisation, the parent organisation of India's ruling party in power, the BJP. Hailing from Bhilwara, Rajasthan, Meghwanshi has published the now famous memoir of the times he worked in the RSS as a Swayamsevak, titled 'I could not be a Hindu: the story of a Dalit in RSS.' "I was compelled to write on my experience after the 2002 Godhra massacre. I initially started writing on Facebook, where I wrote about 54 episodes about my



experience, much of which today have become a part of the book. This was how the book initially started. The responses to the posts were very welcoming. However, the book took time. It was in 2017, that it actually came about, in Hindi.”

Speaking about how his words unsettled people, he narrates, “However, the publishers were...apprehensive. They seemed to want to make some changes, reduce the teekhapan and change the language which constituted a direct attack. However, another publication came, Navarun Prakashan, which published my book in 2019 and later on Navayana also took it forward with an English translation a year later. Now, it has been translated to several languages including Marathi, Malayalam and a Punjabi version is also forthcoming. The response to the book was also great. However, there was absolutely no response from those I criticised, the RSS. Even though they respond and make an uproar about a single Tweet, for which people are often sent to jail, they did not respond to my book.” Meghwanshi terms it as a strategic silence, “They did not wish to give my book and my perspective, any attention so that it might attract more readers. I have heard that some members of the organisation have certainly read my book but they have not responded, in fact and have acted like the book does not exist. There has been violence or intimidation.”

Meghwanshi details how he came to write the book, “In the early 2000s, I used to work in the Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan following which I worked in village camps in affected areas in Gujarat post the 2002 massacre. This really struck me and was the point that moved me to write about my experiences. I could see that Dalit and Adivasi communities were also involved in the violence, in the looting. I wanted them to have 'another face'. I wanted them to know they are being used for politics.” “Furthermore, when the BJP came to power in 2014, I noticed that people were increasingly becoming silent. I felt that I should break the silence, who knows whether I might too be silenced in the coming years.”

While, he states that he did not face violence to his book, he did face comments from people at home. “From people in Bhilwara, there were mixed responses. Because the people I interact and meet with on a daily basis in the city are the characters that are featured in the book. About 80% of the people, the incidents, the place are all from the area, people I see drinking chai at a shop, catching a bus, or train or going about their work. However, there was no violent response. They would certainly give some comments, “Arey Meghwanshi ji, kya likh diya.” But it was limited to that.”

CJP asked him about the impact of his writing and what propelled him to write, “What was different with me was that I wrote. Many people have such experiences, but not many write. The written word always presents a pramanikta (authenticity). Written word can be put to test of truth by court, thereby written words have credibility and they also ensure the writer is accountable and responsible to what he writes.” On the RSS response, Meghwanshi shares his understanding, “It seems that the RSS officials have decided that there would be no reaction to my book. When the book started selling copies in Bhilwara, I had heard from someone that a Dalit parshad was going to burn my book in public. However, the burning never took place. The plan was swiftly, it seems, done away with. I asked one acquaintance why this was happening. One of them told me it is because I am not a communist or Muslim or Christian, they do not wish to bring attention to the question of Dalits within the RSS that an attack on me would bring.”

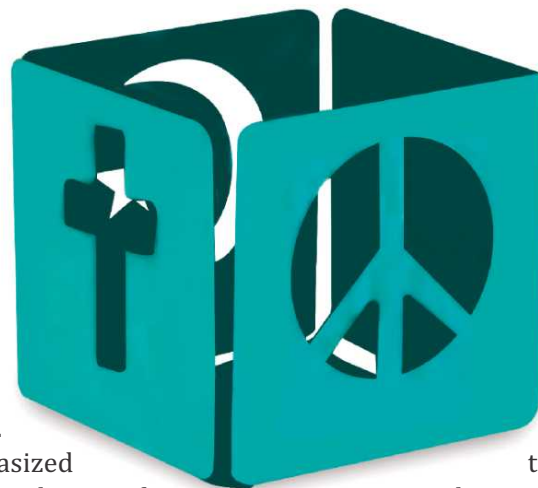
After the book was published, Bhanwar Meghwanshi states that he was contacted by a working professional who was with the RSS for many years who contacted Meghwanshi saying that he had some questions and doubts about the book. The individual, who belongs to a marginalised background, told Meghwanshi that after he heard of the book, he bought it from Amazon, but it ended up lying in his home, unread, for quite some time. Meghwanshi asked the person why, who told him he was not sure he wanted to read it. However, once he did read it, he had even greater curiosity about the book and its contents and thus he sought answers from RSS officials about Meghwanshi's part in the RSS. He called up the official and asked them about the book and its author, he was met with no refrain, the official mentioned that Meghwanshi was a good old Swayamsevak and that these days he was naraaz with the organisation. Meghwanshi and this individual had a lengthy conversation about the book and their experience in the organisation.

Meghwanshi reflects on the impact of his book, “I think when you speak, well within your rights, your life and your life's truth come out and this may guide someone who's lost their way, it may give someone hope ... One incident struck me. Moolchand Rana has mentioned me in his book. He told me that he has worked in the RSS for 49 years and left it after 49 years. However, he was inspired by my writing and encouraged to write by it. That's what it is, writing breaks silence, I think, that is important. One mustn't be silent, one must speak up no matter how much darkness there is.”

*Source: Sabrang India*



# Interfaith Harmony conference vows to promote religious tolerance, peaceful coexistence



**Interfaith Harmony Conference promotes unity, tolerance among religions, calls for accountability in Jaranwala incident.**

Religious leaders and scholars from diverse religious backgrounds converged at the Interfaith Harmony Conference recently held at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts in the federal capital. The conference, organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, served as a platform for prominent figures to advocate for unity, peace and tolerance among different religious communities.

Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Aneeq Ahmed, opened the conference with a powerful message of unity. He strongly condemned any distortion of faith and emphasized the need for all religions to come together. He shed light on the recent tragic incident in Jaranwala, expressing his belief that such incidents should never have occurred. Minister Aneeq also pointed out that neighbouring India had witnessed even worse atrocities against various communities, highlighting that the lives lost among Christian brethren in India were not just Christians but “our brothers.”

He extended his message of inclusivity by highlighting the divine nature of all scriptures, including the Torah, Psalms, Bible and the Holy Quran, affirming that these are all divine revelations, with the Quran being the final one. Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, who also serves as the President of the International Interfaith Harmony Council, shared valuable insights on the importance of

religious cohesion.

He emphasized that the teachings of Islam inherently advocate for peaceful coexistence among all communities.

Ashrafi made it clear that the individuals allegedly involved in the Jaranwala incident were not representatives of any religion but rather of extremism and terrorism. Expressing deep regret over the Jaranwala incident, Ashrafi extended heartfelt apologies to the Christian community. He personally met with Christian leaders to seek forgiveness, reaffirming the commitment to mutual respect and understanding.

However, he also voiced concerns about Pakistan's judicial system acknowledging that if the perpetrators of the Joseph Colony incident had been properly prosecuted, a shameful recurrence in Jaranwala could have been averted. He pointed out several instances of blasphemy and desecration cases awaiting resolution in trial courts, which had remained undecided for years.

Ashrafi mentioned that numerous individuals had been apprehended in connection with the Jaranwala incident and expressed optimism that they would expeditiously receive fair legal treatment in accordance with the country's laws.

Mufti Muneebur Rehman emphasized the need to discard the term 'minorities' and asserted that “regardless of our religious affiliations, we all share a common identity as Pakistanis.” He raised concerns about the nomenclature of religious groups in Pakistan, urging the government to consider more inclusive terms.

He reminded everyone that the rights granted to Muslims by the Constitution were equally applicable to all Pakistanis, irrespective of their beliefs.

Mufti Muneeb also stressed the importance of using appropriate terms, such as Christian for followers of Jesus Christ and specific terms like Jewish, Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist for followers of those respective faiths.





In line with the spirit of inclusivity, Mufti Muneeb suggested refraining from using the term 'infidel' if it carries negative connotations about certain groups. He challenged the notion that terrorism is tied to religion and emphasized that it stems from individual actions. He called for the nation to prioritize combating terrorism and corruption above linguistic debates.

Mufti Muneeb acknowledged the importance of unity in safeguarding the respect of religions and holy books. He called upon adherents of different faiths to stand united against any disrespect towards sacred figures or scriptures. He also cautioned against providing refuge to individuals who commit blasphemy against revered personalities or holy texts, emphasizing that such acts should not be tolerated.

Several other faith leaders and scholars, including Bishop Sarfraz Peter, Pastor Emmanuel Khokhar, Sardar Santok Singh and Archbishop Dr. Joseph Arshad, made significant contributions to the conference. They emphasized legislative measures to control religious violence, the elimination of hate materials from national curricula and the need to shun discriminatory attitudes towards minority communities.

Proposing an enabling environment across the nation, Pastor Emmanuel Khokhar stressed the importance of immediately stopping the teaching of hate material in educational institutions. He urged the government to ensure the swift trial of all those allegedly involved in the Jaranwala tragedy.

Sardar Santok Singh proposed the creation of Amman Committees at the grassroots level to promote peace and tranquillity in all segments of society. On behalf of the Sikh community, he pledged continued participation in nation-building programs.

Archbishop Dr. Joseph Arshad emphasized that faith leaders would persist in their efforts for peace, progress and prosperity in Pakistan. He called upon relevant authorities to use all possible means to create an

**Proposing an enabling environment across the nation, Pastor Emmanuel Khokhar stressed the importance of immediately stopping the teaching of hate material in educational institutions. He urged the government to ensure the swift trial of all those allegedly involved in the Jaranwala tragedy.**

environment of religious harmony.

In addition to these faith leaders, religious scholars and figures, including Dr. Abdul Qadir Haroon, Maulana Abdul Rauf, Air Marshal (retd) Farhat Hussain Malik, Emil Darinoz Tekin, Dr. Sarfaraz Awan and Bishop Nadeem Kamran, contributed their insights during the conference.

The conference drew participation from a diverse range of diplomatic representatives, including those from the United Kingdom, United States of America, Japan, Austria, Italy, Germany, Poland, Turkiye, Indonesia, Turkmenistan, Sweden, Finland, Palestine, Jordan, Myanmar, Iraq, Switzerland, Mauritius, Kazakhstan, Norway, Maldives and more.

The diplomatic community members stood united in their pledge to foster an atmosphere of harmony and tolerance, reflecting the sentiment echoed by the speakers and participants from various faith backgrounds. They unanimously recognized the essential role of unity among religions for Pakistan's progress and global peace.

The conference's key objectives included the protection of rights and laws for the Christian community and other religious minorities. Speakers emphasized that safeguarding these rights was not just a legal obligation but a moral duty aligned with the teachings of Islam.

As the conference concluded, a resounding demand for accountability emerged, particularly concerning the Jaranwala incident. Participants called for a thorough investigation and appropriate punishment for those found responsible, emphasizing that justice must prevail, regardless of religious affiliations, to maintain social harmony and uphold the principles of justice.

In response to recent interfaith disturbances and acts of violence, the faith leaders passed a unanimous resolution, fostering interfaith harmony, promoting religious tolerance and nurturing peaceful coexistence among all communities in Pakistan.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony successfully convened the 'Interfaith Harmony Conference,' bringing together faith leaders, religious scholars, diplomats and individuals from all walks of life. The event demonstrated a united vision of unity and inclusivity, drawing inspiration.

*Source: Associated press of Pakistan*



# Meet the Director: Jyoti Nisha Unveils 'BR Ambedkar, Now and Then' and the Bahujan Narrative

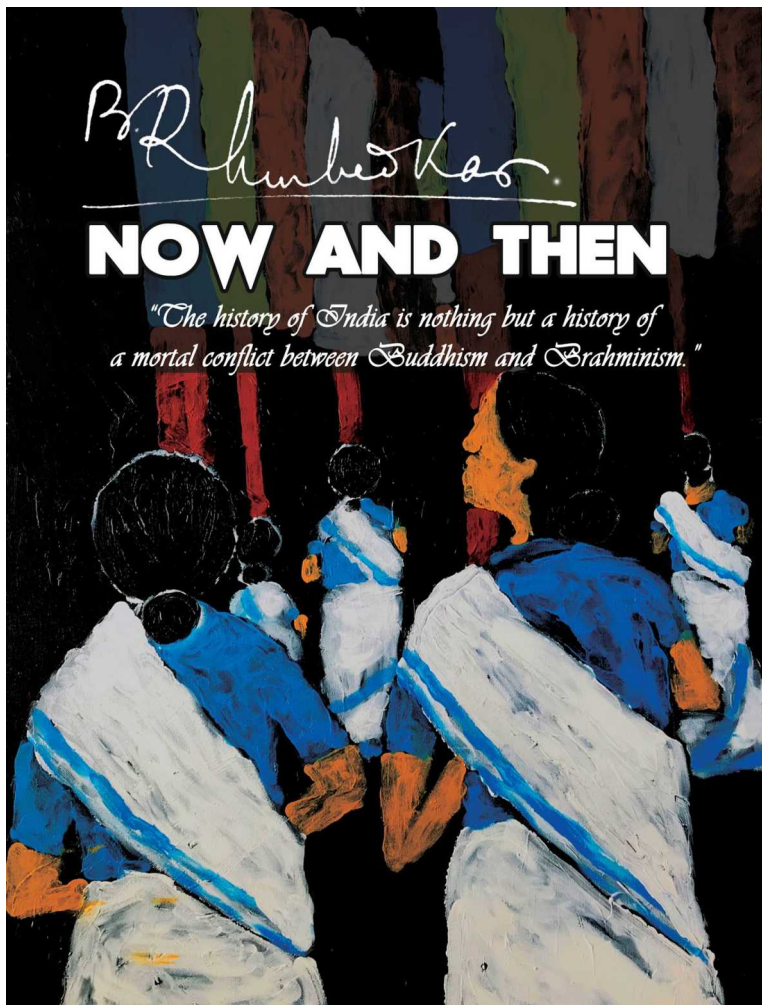
Pratikshit Singh

Step into the world of Jyoti Nisha, the visionary director behind the compelling documentary 'BR Ambedkar, Now and Then.' Delve into an exploration of the Bahujan perspective and the clash of realities within the popular culture, as this filmmaker offers an intimate view into the complex layers of representation, caste struggles and social narratives through her lens. The film features personalities like Jignesh Mewani, Raya Sarkar and some NRI activists. The trailer for the documentary was released recently.

**TM: Please tell us how the film takes forward the Bahujan narrative.**

Jyoti Nisha: As an academician, I have formulated a theory called Bahujan Spectatorship. This theory deals with the question: when marginalized sections see their representation in popular culture, are they able to relate to it? Does it validate the Bahujan perspective, make us laugh, or infuriate us because it distorts the perspective? As a Bahujan, I felt I couldn't relate to the representation of Bahujan culture in the popular narrative. The Bahujan movement revolves around self-respect, but I couldn't see that self-respect in popular culture. There was a grievance that, although our story has been penned by eminent figures like Savitri Bai Phule and Baba Saheb, the representation lacks depth. The film, made by a woman, incorporates an Ambedkarite feminist perspective lens.

Considering my background in an anti-caste Ambedkarite family, I strongly felt the need for the Bahujan anti-caste narrative in popular culture. My inspiration from Bell Hooks, an Afro-American theoretician, heavily





influenced my work. Hooks asserts that popular culture is the site of transgression and literacy. I concur with her because a discussion about the representation of our perspective is essential for communicating our authentic imagination. If education and communication through cinema and literature are to be successful, collaboration with people from our society is crucial. Marxist thinker and French philosopher Louis Althusser opines that cinema is an ideological state apparatus. Therefore, understanding who funds our cinema and why there's a lack of discussion around it is necessary. I disagree with popular culture because it lacks authenticity, especially when there's no collaboration with people from our society. It took eight years to make the film and it features feminist and Dalit activists like Raya Sarkar, Jignesh Mewani, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Urmila Pawar, etc. The film explores cases like Una (flogging Dalits for skinning a dead cow) or the Rohith Vemula case. Our discourse is often dismissed or leans towards leftist perspectives because popular culture lacks knowledge about our culture. I believe the film is essentially about our self-respect.

**TM: What is the significance of the film's title, "BR Ambedkar, Now and Then"?**

Jyoti Nisha: When I began the film, the BJP was appropriating Dr. BR Ambedkar, which led me to question why they were discussing him at that point. He was being talked about, but not in the way that he should have been. The expressions of artists, activists and thinkers from the Bahujan community differed from the mainstream Bahujan community. Figures like Rohith Vemula and Jignesh Mewani were expressing from a distinct perspective. I pondered why the popular culture suddenly became so interested in Baba Saheb in 2014. I realized that appropriation occurs when the privileged community appropriates the culture, music, dress, food, sacred objects and stories of oppressed communities without giving them credit. If they appropriate Baba Saheb socially and culturally, what impact will it have? I believe it was crucial to provide a platform to those who engage with the



state. "Now and then" signifies what's happening today and what occurred in the past in the anti-caste movement.

**TM: Pa Ranjit, with whom you collaborated, uses mainstream cinema to indirectly infuse the Bahujan narrative. What do you think about the subliminal impact made by cinema?**

Jyoti Nisha: We need to understand the state and its apparatus, such as the court, police, judiciary, administration - these are regressive and often ideologically motivated state apparatus. Then there are cultural and ideological state apparatus like family, school, arts, religion, radio, TV, trade movements and activists. Whichever cinema you watch, you can observe symbols representing their ideologies, which affect you personally because you relate to them. When I saw Pa Ranjit's cinema, I felt a personal connection. I find his cinema assertive as he addresses land rights. Even in his latest film, he emphasizes inclusivity. I began working on this cinema in 2016, shooting in two to three states until 2019. Due to limited funds for

post-production, I started crowdfunding. I spoke to Pa Ranjit and pitched the idea to him and he agreed. Working with him has been a great experience. He's supportive and understanding, recognizing the time required to make a film.

**TM: Tell us about yourself and explain your statement that your perspective was clouded by the popular narrative.**

Jyoti Nisha: I come from a background in western UP called Bijnor, where my grandfather was a farmer. My father, Netram Singh, sold grass to complete his diploma and moved to the city when he got a job. He was an ardent Ambedkarite and I witnessed him conducting cadre camps at our home. Most people struggle to fight caste because they can't comprehend its structure. I learned about the caste structure and where I stood within it through my family. My father was the National President of BAMCEF in 2002, the year he passed away. However, my perspective remained clouded by popular culture due to the narratives on TV and in newspapers, which did not align with my experiences.

In 2014, I observed the apprehensions of the Bahujans becoming a reality and it became challenging to ignore these truths. Studying at TISS provided me with the language to articulate my experiences. No matter how skilled your craft is, the content lacks richness and nuance without proper representation. I also questioned whether our own people are aware of our perspective, even if the privileged community is not.

**TM: This is your first full-length documentary film. Please tell us about your earlier projects.**

Jyoti Nisha: I studied scriptwriting at FTII and media and cultural studies at TISS, so I was familiar with scripting but not direction. Although I lacked training as a director, I was well-informed about popular culture and felt I could undertake this endeavor. I faced financial losses after collaborating with the wrong people but learned a great deal. Later, I worked with Dharma Productions for "Geeli Puchchi," and prior to that, I had worked on other projects. Directing involves



being the captain of a ship and attending film school was undoubtedly beneficial. I also served as a producing faculty at Whistling Woods, learning from the students. Filmmaking requires significant funds, especially in cities like Mumbai where living expenses are high. During the making of the film, I often struggled to get enough sleep.

**TM: Explain your lived experience of caste discrimination conflicting with the popular narrative.**

Jyoti Nisha: Discrimination has been a part of my life in various ways. I vividly remember being turned away because of my caste during Kanya Pujan at six years old, which was humiliating. In my twenties, people would question how I could speak good English or mention that I didn't look like a scheduled caste person. I would retort, asking them about their perception of a scheduled caste person. More recently, I mentioned my love for beef kababs in Lucknow and someone asked for my full name, insinuating indirect harassment and a challenge to my work.

The purpose behind making this film was to question the education of privileged communities. If they are educated, where is their humanity? If they are casteist, I nullify their education. It's unfortunate, but caste is a reality in India.

*Source: Mooknayak*



# Minority reports from America and India

Basab Dasgupta

The purpose of this essay is to present interesting similarities and also profound distinctions in how the respective minority populations live in American and Indian societies with some speculations about the future trend. African-Americans are the most important minority group in the US while the Muslims are the most significant in India. Let us start with the demographics. In both cases the minority population is around 14 per cent of the total. More precise numbers are 13.4 per cent blacks in the USA according to the 2019 Census and 14.2 per cent Muslims in India per 2011 Census.

The Muslim population is growing at a faster pace than the Hindus (with their percentage increasing steadily from 10 per cent in 1951) and the percentage of black population is increasing faster than that of the white population. (However, the Asian and Hispanic populations are increasing at even faster rates than blacks, because of immigration – both legal and illegal.) Secondly, just like the blacks, the Muslims seem to prefer living in their “own” communities consisting primarily of fellow Muslims and follow their own culture. “Muslim Ghetto” areas have popped up in most large Indian cities after multiple riots, much like inner city black ghetto neighbourhoods. While social interactions between the majority and minority groups exist, they have not resulted in widespread black and white inter-racial marriages or Hindu-Muslim interfaith marriages in India.

Riots have broken out routinely because of some political decision or alleged injustice, resulting in death, looting and property destruction. Minority groups in both countries feel that they are treated as an inferior class and often discriminated against. In any event, they are typically poorer and less educated than their majority counterparts. The movie industries in both countries often send unifying messages; Hollywood does it by creating movies depicting happy racially mixed couples or families and Bollywood often relies on lyrics of popular hit songs. In both countries, there are



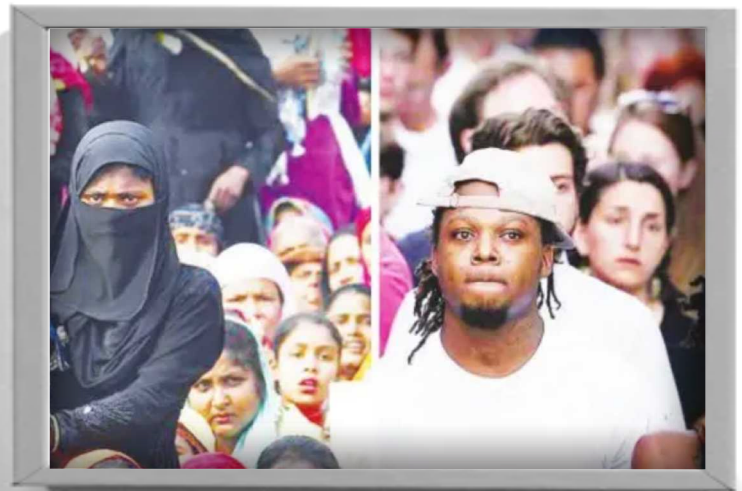
explicit laws and guidelines against any kind of discriminatory behaviour based on race or religion. However, popularity and admiration of celebrities are universal.

The Muslim actors and actresses have glorified Bollywood screens for decades while the Black athletes are the star attractions in many sports in the US, especially basketball, football and track and field. This is probably where the similarities end. The most significant difference between the two situations lies in the history of evolution of the minority population. The blacks were brought to the US as slaves. It took them centuries to overcome the misery and torture of slave life and reach the present status which is still not acceptable to most blacks.

The Muslims on the other hand are by-products of the invaders from the Middle East, be it the Moghuls, Arabs, Persians or Pathans. India's independence from the British was the result of a partition of the British Raj into India with a Hindu majority and Pakistan with a Muslim majority. The US was never divided into a white America and a black America even as an internal subdivision. As a result, the black community is forced to live in a country with a white majority. Ancestors of Muslims who live in India had the choice of moving to Pakistan but apparently loved the place where they lived and preferred to stay in India.

While this love did not translate into their unconditional acceptance by Hindus, their presence gave India the opportunity to become a truly secular

nation. The Muslims have a rich culture, especially in art, literature and architectural design. Think of the Taj Mahal, the Qutb Minar and poems by Kabir. Indians, including the Hindus have benefited from cultural integration. The blacks lack a unifying traditional culture, partly because the slaves came from multiple countries all over Africa. Nevertheless, they have developed a somewhat superficial “black culture” centred mainly around music and dance. Black music, especially the “blues” had a profound impact in shaping rock and roll and jazz music for generations.



The other significant fact is that Muslims were the invaders and ruled India (populated mostly by Hindus) for centuries. The Mughal dynasty ran from the 1500s to the mid-1700s. Blacks have never ruled the United States. The closest was Barack Obama who was elected as president in 2008 and re-elected in 2012. However, Obama was only half-black, his mother being white. Even black governors are few and far between. It is very difficult to separate the Hindus and Muslims living in India based on their physical appearance, although the Muslims tend to have sharper facial features because of their Middle Eastern ancestry.

In the case of blacks and whites, the difference is obvious based on skin colour. What is interesting is that the two countries seem to be going in opposite directions in terms of how they handle the minority populations. Groups like “Black Lives Matter” (BLM) have surfaced in the US in recent years mainly because of the perceived brutality of the white police force against the black youth and other injustice against the blacks.

After the death of George Floyd, a black man, in police custody in 2020, this rage against police boiled over into nation-wide violent riots and lootings. As a result, politicians, corporations, educational institutes, Hollywood, sports organizations and advertising agencies have made major changes in their practices to be more inclusive to accommodate black folks and their culture. President Biden had nominated Kamala Harris (whose father is black) as his running mate and selected several blacks for his cabinet as well as for

Supreme Court nomination. Emphasis on diversity is the mantra. Talks about reparations to the blacks have already started.

India seems to be going backwards. The country is turning from a unique secular country into a “Hindu nationalist” state. The ruling dispensation's ideology based on “Hindutva” has been evident. Government subsidies to the Muslims for their pilgrimage to Mecca are being phased out. The fact that India has been a peaceful democratic, socialist and secular nation since her independence suggests that a culture with diverse and inclusive views is probably more compatible with peaceful coexistence of all its citizens.

On the other hand, India's economy was almost stagnant during the so-called “pre-liberalization” period from 1947 to 1991 and then started to slowly expand. It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who adopted a capitalistic (neo-liberal) model which propelled the country's economy to be on par with the leading countries of the world. Perhaps economic prosperity through capitalism and peaceful coexistence ala socialism are mutually exclusive.

It remains to be seen if the USA can continue its economic supremacy while moving forward with an agenda of diversity. There are already concerns on the part of many economists that the massive spending spree by the Biden administration might stall the US economy at some point in future

*Source: The Statesman*



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



Deepak Pariyar

In May 2020, when the world was reeling under the onslaught of Covid, the killing of George Floyd in the United States had stirred the US and the world. This is also believed to be the reason behind the defeat of Donald Trump in November that year. However, Floyd tragically succumbed to strangulation by a racist white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a Dalit youth, along with his five friends, was lynched to death in Rukum west district in Nepal.

The youth, Nabaraj BK, wanted to marry his upper-caste girlfriend, who had called the boy to pick him up, but was chased and beaten to death by the family members of the girl when he came to the girl's village along with five of his friends. The couple did not have the approval of the girl's family for the marriage as the boy belonged to the untouchable caste. The killings had drawn international attention and the United Nations had condemned the incident. In a statement, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet expressed shock over the incident and said, "It is distressing to know that caste-based prejudices remain deeply entrenched in our world in the 21st century."

Earlier, in 2016, Ajit Dhakal Mijar, an 18-year-old young Dalit youth, was found dead under mysterious circumstances. His father filed a first information report, alleging it to be a murder and named three accused. Ajit was in an inter-caste relationship with a girl who belonged to the so-called "dominant caste." However, the police registered the death as suicide. Ajit's father refused to believe the version of the police and took the exhumed body to the hospital, where the corpse is still preserved in a morgue at a Teaching Hospital in Maharajganj, Nepal, as his father refused to perform the last rites until he gets justice. The lower court has acquitted the accused and the deceased's family has pinned hopes on the Supreme Court.

These dastardly incidents come at a time when the Dalits in Nepal have achieved some mobility and representation in Nepali's administration, giving them some voice after the abolition of the monarchy in 2006. Caste in Nepal has a deep-rooted history and continues to play a significant role in the country's social, cultural and political landscape. The caste system in Nepal is primarily based on the Hindu varna system, which categorizes people into different social groups or castes. Although the transition to a federal democracy has facilitated perceptible mobility for the Dalits in Nepal, most of whom had to face worse casteism than their Indian counterparts.

## **Transition to Democracy: A Ray of Hope for Dalits in Nepal**

Nepal has made efforts to address caste-based discrimination through legal reforms. The Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) and the subsequent Constitution of Nepal (2015) explicitly prohibit caste-based discrimination and provide affirmative action measures for marginalized groups, including Dalits. However, implementation remains a challenge.

These changes have led to increased discussions about identity, inclusion and social justice, including caste-related issues. It's important to note that while caste continues to be a significant factor in Nepali society, there are ongoing efforts by activists, civil society organizations and the government to promote social inclusion, reduce discrimination and create a more equitable society. One such organization is the Dignity Initiative, an organization that works for Dalit rights.

## **Paradigm Shift in Caste Discrimination but Caste Exists in a Different Mould**

The Mooknayak spoke to Rup Sunar, who runs the Dignity Initiative. Rup belongs to the Sunar community



of Nepal, a caste classified as "untouchable" in Nepal. He says that there has been a paradigm shift in caste practices in Nepal, at least in urban areas. Earlier, when Nepal was a kingdom, people used to openly commit violence. Dalits willing to eat or have tea had to do it outside the eatery and had to wash their own utensils and glasses afterward, even in urban areas. But these things are no longer practiced in cities, although they are still prevalent in rural areas.

Rup also mentions that caste discrimination may not be as blatant as in the days of the monarchy, but people have to find some pretext to commit caste-based atrocity. For example, in the case of the Soti village massacre in which Nabaraj BK was murdered along with five of his friends, the girl's family accused the slain victims of human trafficking.

Despite all these hiccups, the Dalits are overcoming resistance and have steamrolled their way into success. Prakash Saput is one such Dalit singer who has attained success and made a name in the folk music industry. Earlier, singers from the dominant castes used to hijack the songs of Dalit singers by appropriating them in their names, but today it has become difficult to do so because of awareness and Dalit assertion.

### **Political Representation of Dalits**

Rup, who has done an extensive study on caste and political representation, points out that the interim constitution (2007) had provisions for the representation of Dalits. "The constitution provided for 40% seats from the first-past-the-post system and 60% from the proportional voting system. This was a quite meaningful arrangement as under FPTP, it's very difficult to find a ticket for Dalit to contest an election.

On top of that, they lack financial backup to contest the election. Whereas under the proportional system, parties allocate certain seats for Dalits and they are elected as the electoral strength of the party. Meaning that if parties get 100 seats under proportional representation, 13 would have to be allocated for Dalits."

However, the 2015 Constitution established a federal system with three levels of government: federal, provincial and local. The mixed electoral system reversed the arrangement of the interim constitution and reserved 60% of the seats in the parliament for the First-past-the-post system. Additionally, they also reserved seats for the dominant Khas Arya group. Rup says that although there has been a perceptible improvement in the representation of the Dalits, this arrangement has undermined the reservation system and needs to be more inclusive.

Besides, there is 9% reservation for the Dalit community, who account for around 14% of the total population of the country. To address the underrepresentation of Dalits in the reservation system, a fair allocation of 13 out of every 100 seats is imperative. This adjustment reflects the proportion of their population and necessitates amendments to the electoral system.

So, while democracy has proved to be an enabler for Dalit assertion and awareness, much needs to be done when it comes to securing the rights of the most marginalized community of Nepal. Emerging artists, civil rights activists and growing representation in the parliament provide some hope.

*Source: Mooknayak*



# Students at Ashoka University push for a caste census on campus

Vidheesha Kuntamalla



Students at Delhi's Ashoka University's Social Justice Forum (SJF), an independent student body advocating for the rights of those who belong to ethnic and religious minority backgrounds, have requested the varsity's administration to float an online petition pressing for a comprehensive caste census.

The move comes after the forum had previously demanded an independent anti-discrimination cell, which would counter various forms of discrimination on campus.

On November 7, the SJF along with about 200 signatories, sent a letter to Vice Chancellor Somak Raychaudhury stating: "Over the years, we have witnessed various instances where people belonging to marginalized identities have faced discriminatory behaviour and acts. Regrettably, these incidents often go unaccounted for and unaddressed due to the absence of a formal reporting body...."

It further said, "The lack of a formal body in this University to handle issues on discrimination is not only a substantial oversight that encourages openly discriminatory behavior with impunity but is also against the law. In 2012, the UGC issued the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutes) Regulations, 2012 ('the Regulations')."

In a response to the letter, Raychaudhury said, "...we are actively working on establishing a robust Student Grievance Redressal Committee (SGRC) in accordance with the latest UGC Regulations of 2023. The SGRC will address a wide spectrum of concerns. In addition, we are also constituting an Equal Opportunities Cell to specifically address cases of discrimination. As with all committees dealing with student complaints at Ashoka, we aim to include elected student representatives in the composition of both these committees."

He further stated that his office is engaged in drafting the requirements for these committees and "we expect that these committees will be operational early in the next semester" and in the meantime students can write to the nodal officer, who is the registrar of the University.

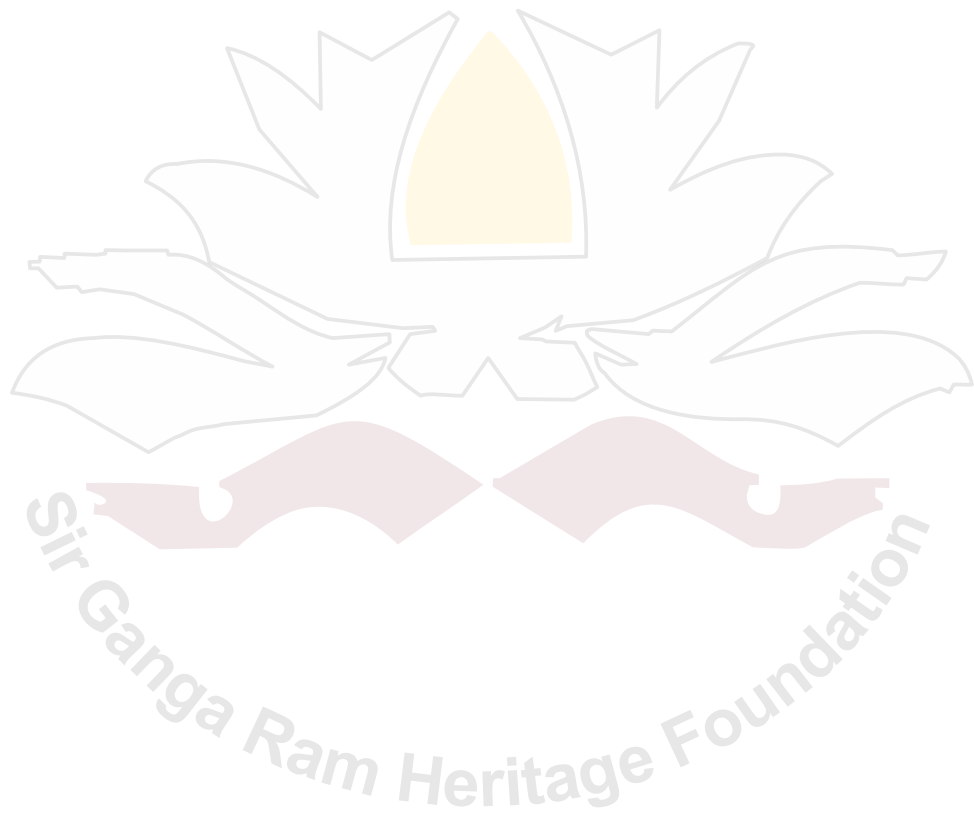
Speaking to The Indian Express, an SJF member, on the condition of anonymity said, "It has been 11 years since the University has been set up but there is no independent body to specifically counter discrimination.... Similar attempts like this one have been made by the Forum in the past 4 years, but even today after the VC responded there is still no clarity on how this body will be formed."

"We are demanding an anti-discrimination cell, but the admin is still calling it the equal opportunity cell or the SGRC, we are unsure whether we are on the same page. There has been a very vague response from the VC's side as there have been no specifics on who would be the members of this cell and who would constitute this cell," the student added.

In addition to this, sharing their view on the upcoming student body election, students said that they have demanded the administration to initiate a caste census to understand whether students from various backgrounds have equal access to opportunity or not.

"The elected student body is only a bridge between the admin and students. We need a proper body to tackle discrimination on campus and we have been demanding it for quite some time now. We plan on writing to the VC once more to float an online caste census form," said another student on the condition of anonymity.

*Source: Indian Express*



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