



International Commission for Dalit Rights

Violence against Dalits, 'Schedule Castes' Increased Seven-Times More in India

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The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) has reported that over 15 years, the number of incidents of crime against “Scheduled Castes” in India has increased roughly seven times. Many claim that the success of the Hindu nationalist BJP party in the latest election, which brought in Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, has fueled ancient flames against this disenfranchised group. Such violence comes ironically amidst PM Modi’s hyped inauguration of the Ambedkar House in London, named after B.R. Ambedkar, once the chief architect of India’s constitution and himself a Dalit. But while the violence against Dalits could be seen as being exacerbated by the BJP, many point to a more alarming long-term trend. Prominent cases include the “lynching of five Dalits in Dulina village in Jhajjar district in 2002, burning down of Dalit houses in Gohana in 2005 and burning alive of a physically challenged girl and her septuagenarian father in Mirchpur in 2010.”¹ With Indian Prime Minister Modi’s emergence into global politics, a new drive to press the government for accountability in the recent rise in caste-related attacks is necessary.

Background

India’s caste system, a remnant of early Hinduism, divides Indian society into social strata that can dictate education, job placement, and even marriage. The Dalits, who were once referred to as the “untouchables” for being associated with holding unclean manual labor jobs, are regarded as the most disadvantaged of the five dominant castes that still exist in the country.² Up until the early 2000s, cultural practices and the institution of caste-based discrimination had prevented Dalits from achieving any real form of political representation. Even now, however, the system has proven quite difficult to reform despite India’s legal measures against caste-based discrimination. The caste system is not only responsible for a lack of upward social mobility for Dalits, but has led

¹ The Indian Express <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/haryana-dalit-attacks-7-fold-jump-in-3-govts/>

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http://www.salon.com/2015/10/22/the_modern_horrors_of_indias_ancient_injustice_how_a_government_has_abandoned_millions_and_they_are_fighting_back/

to indiscriminate structural violence without impunity against members of this once-silent community. Despite decades of reform and political activism, a 2012 survey by Mangalore University showed that 93% of Dalit households continue to live below the national poverty line, amidst a growing wave of violence by “higher” castes.

Facts: Killing Infants to Journalists

A recent wave of caste-associated violence and killings of Dalits across India is threatening to unravel the decades of political progress that India has undergone since its founding. The following are just a few examples of the known violence against Dalits in India:

1. *Two infants killed:* The recent killing of two infants aged 9 months and 2 years in an arson attack in Sunped village in Hayrana has once again brought caste-based violence against Dalits to international attention. On the night of October 20, a group from the Rajput caste lit the house ablaze, which according to local police officials, was a revenge attack for an old feud. Local dalits say tension had been simmering between the Dalits and upper castes for a year and started with a fight broke out when local Dalit children were asked to fetch a phone that had fallen into a drain as an overt act of caste-ism. The Rajput caste members deny the claim and blamed the murder of three Rajputs in October 2014 on the Dalit community in the aftermath. Despite the fact that local police have arrested 11 for the attack, local Dalits claim police complicity and possible police involvement in the Sunped arson. The incident has caused a flaring of tensions between the Dalit and Rajput communities of Sunped. A local Dalit leader called the act the “final nail in the coffin” for crimes against Dalits.³
2. *Fifteen and 21-year old Dalit youths burned to death:* Following the Sunped arson, a 21-year-old Dalit youth was allegedly burnt to death by a former village head and his family members over old rivalry in Daulatpur. Six people are under investigation and sources say the attack was caused by a prior scuffle. And just days later, a 15-year old boy was burned alive in Sonapat. The perpetrators were two police officers who were accused of murder after the boy was charged with the theft of a pigeon. The chief minister of Sonapat ruled

³ The Daily Mail. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-3281581/Caste-fire-engulfs-house-Faridabad-killing-two-Dalit-children.html>

out caste conflict and claimed that it had been a suicide, causing the family of the victim to clash with police officers.⁴

3. *Dalit Journalist Ambushed:* In late October, 23-year-old Hunchangi Prasad, a journalism student at Davangere University was ambushed by a group of 8-10 people, saying his writings were anti-Hindu, attacked and threatened with a knife for any further writing of the caste issue. Hunchangi had written a piece a year earlier about caste system and its roots in Hinduism, spurring right wing backlash. Mr. Prasad said he was emboldened to keep writing, however, it is unclear how many others have been threatened to staying quiet as police rarely seem to respond to such attacks against Dalits.⁵
4. *Dalits prevented from worship at temple:* Members of upper castes attacked three members of the Dalit community, including one woman, for praying at the Mahasu-Devata temple in Laksiyar-Kenota in late October. It was reported that local police only “accepted the complaint only when a large number of Dalits, led by Jabbar Singh, a local Dalit leader sat on dharna at the police station.” Until recently, Dalits were prevented from worshipping in temples in the village. It was only after protests in the village that local authorities allowed the Dalit community to worship in city temples.⁶
5. *Anti-Dalit riots prevent Dalit ritual:* At least four vehicles belonging to Dalits were lit ablaze by caste Hindus in the Elumalai and Athankaraipatti villages near Madurai. The arson occurred when 500 members, including women and children, of the Dalit community from Athankaraipatti had arrived in Elumalai for a ritual. Worshippers were met by roughly 2,000 members of intermediate castes, who blockaded the Dalits from entering, severely injured 3 Dalit worshippers and torched several vehicles.⁷
6. *Nintey-year-old Dalit worshipper burned alive:* A 90-year old Dalit man named Kimma Ahirwar was burned alive in Uttar Pradesh for entering the local Maidani Baba Temple in early October.⁸ This is yet more evidence that Dalits are unable to freely practice their religion without being subjected to violence.

⁴ Tribune India. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/sc-youth-burnt-in-yamunanagar-village-six-booked/149330.html>

⁵ The Hindu. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/young-dalit-writer-targeted-in-davanagere/article7793036.ece>

⁶ India Today. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/dalits-attacked-in-dehradun-temple/1/505418.html>

⁷ New India Express. http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil_nadu/Temple-Fest-Turns-Violent-in-Madurai-Dalit-Vehicles-Burnt-by-Caste-Hindus/2015/10/23/article3092733.ece

⁸ India Today. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/90-year-old-dalit-burnt-alive-for-entering-temple-in-bundelkhand-region-of-up/1/489318.html>

As cases like these are becoming more common, the true nature of violence could possibly be even more severe than reported. In the past, Dalit activists have complained of intimidation by members of higher castes to remain quiet. While in many cases, caste-based violence is indeed a result of police complicity, many have argued that these incidents are a lingering legacy of old tensions and that state reforms have removed structural hindrances to Dalit rights. This theory, however, was tested when two Dalit sisters had to flee their homes after being sentenced by an “all-male council” to gang rape after their brother had married into a higher caste. And even as the government claims that it is more inclusive and structural discrimination is a thing of the past, there are those in the government that continue to perpetuate stereotypes. Union Minister V.K. Singh caused quite a stir recently when he made a statement that was interpreted as referring to Dalits as dogs after the Sunped arson.

Combat Caste-based Violation:

The [*International Commission for Dalit Rights \(ICDR\)*](#) urges Government of India to undertake special training of law enforcement agencies, procuracy, and court employees on caste-based violence, including use and enforcement of legal obligations. The Ministry of Home Affairs should issues public statements condemning caste-based violence and express strong support for their employees, civil society and Dalit Rights defenders to enforce mechanisms to combat it. The ICDR also calls the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and other UN human rights mechanisms to not only increase reporting on the issue of murder and torture in India’s Haryana province, but also press the Government of India to invite the rapporteur for an impartial investigation of caste-based violence throughout the country.

At our most recent meeting with **Prof. Juan Mendez, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture** in Washington DC, **Dr. Ramesh Nathan, the General Secretary of the *National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights in India***, shared with you a number of cases of horrific murders, rape, gang rape, theft, and other atrocities committed against Dalits in India. Dr. Nathan gave special credence to the alarming rate of acts of torture committed against Dalits by Indian police and military units. He added that while actions have been taken to limit these incidents – like the installation of CCTV cameras at police stations – cases of torture remain high and caste-based discrimination remain a systemic issue that must be addressed with greater scrutiny.

The ICDR urges the office of the special rapporteur to investigate torture and structural violence against Dalits and take appropriate measures to ensure that state authorities and members of Indian society should not discriminate based on caste, descent or origin and the perpetrators of violence shall be held accountable. The ICDR believes a series of measures should be taken by the Office of the Special Rapporteur to ensure that such violence be brought to international attention. With numerous atrocities occurring throughout the world, little attention has been given to the plight of the Dalit community in Southeast Asia as of late.

Yet despite this, the *Dalit Women's Self-Respect* tour has been protesting against violations of human rights throughout cities in the United States, hoping to bring light to the sexual violence and caste-based discrimination being committed against Dalits in India. In addition, the government should help ICDR and its local civil society coalition for a development of ***Caste Freedom Index***, as a part of improve the process of collecting national statistics on caste-based violation and discrimination.

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