Research Paper Political Science

DALIT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Untouchability and caste discrimination are the fundamentals of Dalit Human Rights violations. This paper investigates the institutional shift in Human Rights violations from untouchability the most powerful operational institution until the pre-independence period to the new emergent institution of exclusion in post-independence era.

KEYWORDS

Introduction:

Caste discrimination, manifested through an array of "untouchability practices," is an entrenched part of daily life in India. This "hidden apartheid" impacts more than 160 million Dalits the victims, survivors, and challengers of the practice, as well as approximately 860 million non-Dalits the perpetrators, bystanders, and witnesses. Despite domestic policy measures and increased attention to the issue, the practice of untouchability remains ingrained and touches nearly every aspect of Dalit life. Untouchability practices range from actions that impact the minutiae of daily life, to life-altering inequity and denials of opportunity, to violence committed with impunity. A sampling of untouchability practices include: the refusal of upper-caste individuals to walk in or cross the shadow of a Dalit; segregated food and drink and designated water vessels and utensils for Dalits; forced and bonded labor practices; conscription into "unclean" occupations including prostitution, manual scavenging (removing waste from "dry" toilets), and the removal of animal carcasses; the prohibition to intermarry with other castes; and rules governing religious practices, including prohibition from public temples and exclusion from ceremonies and rituals. In addition, caste-motivated violence occurs with regularity. Atrocities committed against Dalits include assault, rape, and murder and are often committed with impunity.

Indian Domestic Policy:

Although caste discrimination persists as a widespread and divisive issue in India, the Indian government has taken a host of measures to abolish untouchability, to create mechanisms of enforcement, and to enact policy to combat discrimination against Dalits in government, the workplace, and education. The 1950 Indian Constitution formally abolishes untouchability, prohibits caste discrimination, and expands the system of "Scheduled Caste" reservations initiated by the British Raj that allocated places for Dalits in educational institutes, civil service positions, and state and national legislatures. In addition, the government of India responded to pressure from Dalit groups to pass laws and constitutional amendments increasing protections and expanding reservations systems. As a result, small but significant gains have been made in the past 60 years; a trivial percentage of Dalits have benefited from educational opportunities, become wealthier, and risen to high government positions. Despite small-scale improvements, however, caste discrimination remains pervasive committed especially by higher caste Hindus and profoundly impacts the socio-economic mobility of Dalits. Many Dalit activists blame the government and political parties for not taking stronger actions to combat the social and economic exclusion of Dalits.

Dalit human rights has become an international issue and organisations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Minority Rights Group and Anti-Slavery International are making Dalit Human Rights a priority issue and are concerned to raise the issue internationally in UN bodies, governments and the public-atlarge. For the most part, the international community, particularly the general public residing outside of India, is unaware that untouchability and daily/routine forms of caste discrimination are still practised in India. However, in recent years an increasing number of human rights organisations and bodies are coming to recognise untouchability and caste discrimination as a gross human rights violation.

Reservation and its impact :

Regardless of these fallacies in the realisation of the anti discriminatory laws, the provisions of positive discrimination through reservation benefited hundreds of thousands of Dalits and other disadvantaged sections. It provided Dalits with many safeguards such as (a) social, educational, cultural and religious safeguards, (b) economic safeguards, (c) political safeguards and (d) safeguards for employment. Reservation in the educational institutions and the financial assistance in the form of scholarships and freeships constitute perhaps the most important aspect of this scheme. It is primarily an attempt to make the basic input of education available to them. Without education, all the constitutional safeguards including the reservation in services would be in fructuous (George 2004: 90). Under this scheme the Dalit students whose parental income is below a specified level, get freeship, reservation in admissions to all the colleges getting grants in aid from the government, and scholarships.

Reservation and Dalit Education:

Reservation of scheduled castes in schools remains largely unfilled. Several fact-findings and researches had repeatedly established the existence of segregation of Dalit students at all levels of institutionalized education. The upper caste teachers mistreat and portray a demeaning image, resulting in a very low self–esteem on the part of Dalit students. Calling caste names and verbal abuse is a common practice in these schools. This is one of the major reasons for high drop-out rates among Dalits. Therefore, despite reservation their educational status remained subdued.

TO SUM-UP:

The question of Dalit Human Right is not just a matter of addressing the atrocities, but at large it corroborates to the affirmation of land rights of Dalits, resisting the forces of globalisation, communalism, casteism, patriarchy, violence, peacelessness, injustice and so on. This paves the way for collective action. This is the ethical course of addressing Dalit human rights.