Blog Article

HOW HINDUISM'S SOCIAL HIERARCHY UNDERMINES HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

Taha Nazir PhD
Research Scientist, Writer, Media Professional and Social Worker. https://tahanazir.com/

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Correspondence: Taha Nazir PhD, Researcher, Worker, and Journalist. Thomson Reuters - ID N-5730-2015 | ORCID ID - orcid.org/0000-0002-5308-6798 | https://tahanazir.com

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How **classism in India,** rooted in **Hinduism's caste system**, and how it undermines **human rights, ethics, and the rule of law**:

- The caste system in Hinduism is one of the oldest known forms of social stratification, historically dividing society into four main varnas: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (laborers). Outside this system are Dalits ("untouchables"), who were historically excluded from society and assigned "polluting" tasks like manual scavenging, leather work, and cremation.
- Although India's Constitution outlawed caste-based discrimination in 1950 (Article 15, Article 17), in practice caste hierarchies remain deeply embedded in society, particularly in rural areas and even in urban institutions.
- Dalits and Scheduled Castes (SCs) make up approximately 16–17% of India's population, yet face widespread discrimination in access to education, healthcare, employment, and justice.
- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), over 50,000 cases of atrocities against SCs and STs

(Scheduled Tribes) are reported annually. These include physical assaults, rape, arson, and social boycotts — with conviction rates often below 30%, indicating systemic impunity.

- In villages, Dalits are often denied access to temples, water sources, and common areas, despite legal protections. In 2023, a Dalit boy in Rajasthan was reportedly beaten to death for drinking water from a pot meant for upper-caste teachers.
- Caste-based residential segregation is common. In rural India, Dalits often live in separate hamlets or outskirts, reinforcing physical and psychological exclusion. Real estate listings sometimes openly state "Brahmin preferred."
- Educational discrimination is prevalent. A study by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (2008) found that Dalit students face higher dropout rates, bullying by upper-caste teachers, and lower grades despite similar academic performance.
- In prestigious Indian institutions like IITs and AIIMS, suicides by Dalit and Adivasi students have raised national concerns. Cases like Rohith Vemula's suicide in 2016 highlighted how caste bias continues to marginalize lower-caste students even in elite spaces.
- Employment discrimination is subtle but widespread. A 2010 study published in Economic & Political Weekly found that identical resumes with upper-caste surnames received significantly more callbacks than those with Dalit surnames.
- Manual scavenging, a practice linked directly to caste, still exists in many Indian states despite being banned under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers Act (2013). As of 2023, government data recorded over 58,000 manual scavengers, most of whom are Dalit women.
- Caste continues to shape marriage choices. According to the India Human Development Survey (2011–12), over 95% of Indians marry within their caste. Inter-caste couples, especially involving Dalit men, often face honor killings, primarily in states like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan.
- Religious justification of caste is still present. Hindu scriptures such as Manusmriti prescribe duties, punishments, and moral codes based on caste, reinforcing inequality as "divinely ordained." Though some reformist Hindus reject this, many conservative groups continue to legitimize it.
- Political parties use caste as a tool, organizing votes through caste blocs rather than focusing on public welfare or ethical governance. This reduces democracy to identity arithmetic instead of merit- or issue-based politics.
- Caste is also commercialized in the form of caste-based matrimonial services (e.g., Shaadi.com, BharatMatrimony) where users are categorized by caste and sub-caste, reinforcing social divisions under the guise of personal choice.
- Casteism exists in the Indian diaspora too. In 2020, a lawsuit in California accused Cisco Systems of allowing caste-based discrimination in the workplace. In the UK and Canada, Dalits have reported social exclusion by upper-caste Indians in temples, businesses, and community groups.
- Ethical implications are severe: caste-based exclusion violates international human rights laws, including Article 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantee equality in dignity and rights, and non-discrimination.
- The United Nations and Human Rights Watch have repeatedly criticized India's failure to end caste-based violence and discrimination, urging the government to enforce laws, ensure accountability, and improve representation of Dalits in public life.

- Religious reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar rejected Hinduism's caste structure and converted to Buddhism in 1956, taking millions of Dalits with him. His legacy continues to challenge caste oppression intellectually and politically.
- The Bhakti movement, although critical of caste, failed to eliminate structural discrimination. Today, Hindu nationalist groups often downplay or justify caste, resisting affirmative action and denying systemic inequality.
- The rule of law is undermined when police, judiciary, and administration — often dominated by upper castes — fail to deliver justice fairly. Dalits rarely see their grievances addressed, leading to deep mistrust in democratic institutions.
- Classism and casteism also corrupt ethics, as privilege is mistaken for moral superiority. Individuals internalize caste pride or inferiority, damaging self-worth, social cohesion, and moral reasoning.

What you think how classism in India undermines human rights, ethics, and the rule of law? tell us by reply in comment section.

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