

A CASE STUDY OF DALITS IN NAGAU DISTRICT OF RAJASTHAN

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“THE state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker section of the people, and in particular, of the scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation”.

- Article 46 of the Indian constitution.

Abstract

The caste system is pre-dominantly an Indian crisis. In no other country it's as blatantly prevalent as in India. Hinduism claims the division of four castes (Verna)- Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vishay's and Shudras. . Dalits did not even fit into this hierarchy because they are considered lower than the Shudras. They are dubbed as 'Avaranas' (devoid of caste) and their very touch is impure. Therefore they are distanced from upper caste in every sphere of life. This notion is propagated through centuries and has extended to other religions like - Christianity and Islam as well. The term 'Dalit' was first coined by a social reformer and revolutionary named Mahatma Jotirao Phule. And the present usage of the term 'Dalit' goes back to 19th century when Jotirao used it to describe the outcastes and ex-untouchables as the oppressed and broken victims of the caste- ridden-society. However the term Dalit was popularized by Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra in 1970's and in their manifesto they expanded its referents. The term 'Dalit' has its roots in Sanskrit word 'Dal' which means 'held under check' suppressed or oppressed or broken. Generally the term 'Dalit' includes those who are designated in administrative parlance as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes. However, in common political discourse, the term 'Dalit' is so far mainly referred to Scheduled Castes. The term 'Scheduled- Castes' appeared for the first time in April 1935, when the British Government issued Government of India (Scheduled Caste) order of 1936, specifying certain castes, races and tribes as Scheduled- Castes.

Introduction

Rajasthan with Scheduled Castes population of 122.2 lakh ranks number 2 in terms of crime rate against Dalits followed by Madhya Pradesh while ranks number three in total number of cases followed by Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. There are number of cases which remained unreported. Despite of decades old-laws criminalizing untouchability, it appears to be practiced by nearly two third of rural Rajasthan. Dalit communities comprise roughly one fifth of the total population of Rajasthan. Some of the major Dalit communities in Rajasthan are - Meghwals (largest one amongst Dalits in Rajasthan), Jatavs, Bairwas, Raigars (Jatia), Chamar, Balai, Bunkar and Khtik etc .Caste system is very strong in Rajasthan .There is a clear cut division between the lower and upper castes. The upper castes are economically and socially more powerful groups .They mediate between poor people and state and also exercise influence in the social affairs at the local level. Caste continues to be significant with regard to social relationships, marriage and occupational pursuits and in influencing people's livelihood choices and strategies. Access to justice and natural capital (including common property resources, water and forests) is highly correlated with caste system in Rajasthan. Thus, across the state the Scheduled Castes have the least land and livestock and minimal access to groundwater and irrigation sources. The unequal distribution of land, therefore, is exacerbated by differentiated access to water. As drinking water is a scarce and precious resource in the extremely dry parts of western Rajasthan, its management is a source of power that has been exercised by powerful sections of the community to maintain their control and influence over marginalized groups. For example, if the village only has one source of water that is located in the upper caste locality, members of lower castes are often expected to provide free farm labour to the upper castes in exchange of water. In other cases, they are not even allowed to fetch water from the source. Various surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization of the Government highlights realities of Scheduled Castes, which include Dalits.

- About 20% of the population belongs to Scheduled Castes,
- Only 1% of the Scheduled Caste population own land size of 4.01 hectares (The proportion of households possessing land of size 4.01 hectares (9.91 acres) or more,
- Only 47% of Scheduled Castes population in rural areas call themselves as cultivators,
- Among non-cultivators, 20% are agricultural labourers,
- In urban areas, barely 28% are employed in administrative jobs, production farming etc;
- Among self employed, 41.7% earn regular wages and 23.3% are casual labourers.
- Average value of assets the Scheduled Caste population possess is about half of all other groups put together both in urban and rural areas.
- Only 3% of the Scheduled Caste can spend Rs.38.50 per day in rural areas while in urban area only 1% can spend Rs.81.67 per day.

After giving a detail analysis on Dalits regarding their Historical background, meaning and what actually constitutes a Dalit identity in the introductory part of this paper I rather would feel myself a luckiest person (especially from Jammu and Kashmir UT) to present a Case study on the issues of Dalits in Nagaur District of Rajasthan. It is my privilege to go in depth to ascertain the issues pertaining to Dalit communities and do make this Case study a successful discourse. This will be helpful for the Dalit activists, scholars, media personnel's and advocates. I am sure, this will be read with great interest and intention and the purpose of bringing out this Case study will be served.

Case study

Nagaur is one of the districts of Rajasthan state. According to village patwari, of the 2,500 households in the village, there are 1200 Jat - families and 130 Meghwal – families. The Meghwals are among the more outspoken Dalits in Rajasthan. Compared with other Dalit sub castes they have done relatively better for themselves and yes of course are more assertive. Dangawas in Nagaur district is just 59 kilometers from the Tourist town of Pushkar. Only 2 kilometers away from the tehsil headquarters. In this same village there have been four recent instances of the Dalit atrocities, the most brutal of which is this recent one.



One such case is that of the atrocity specialist village in question - Dangawas, where Dholaram Meghwal a village Dalit own 23 bighas, 5 biswas of land, Bastiram his son mortgaged the land in 1964 at merely Rs.1500 under the condition that Chimnaram Jat would cultivate and take the yield from this land at no payment of land rent. Within 4 years, as Bastiram's financial conditions improved, he repaid the Loan of Rs.1500. However, the Jat refused to move from the land as they contested that Bastiram sold the land to them and not mortgaged it for money. For over 2 - decades Bastiram and his family tried to get back what was legally theirs only to realize that

their voices would not be heard. In the span of next 20 years, Dholaram Meghwal died and the land title was transferred to Bastiram Meghwal [his son]. In 2006, Bastiram died and the land title was transferred to his son - Ratnaram Meghwal. The Jats would still not budge. For 3-generations spanning nearly 4-decades then Jats occupied land which legally and rightfully belonged to the Dalit. The Jats would just not budge. Once the land title was transferred to Ratnaram [Bastiram's son] - he started raising the issue of his land afresh. In 2006 Jats filed a Revenue Writ in the Medta Court claiming ownership of the land under the [RTA] Rajasthan Tenancy Act 1955 - section 212 and 188. The case was in court for nearly 9 years, when finally in March 2015, the court ruled in favour of Dalits, of Ratnaram Meghwal. Finally after a wait of over a half century. Ratnaram could live on the land that belonged to his family or could he. After this legal victory, Ratnaram built both a Pakka -House and a Kachha -Hut and began living here with his family. On 20 April, 2015 barely a month after the Court's ruling, the two sons of the Chimnaram Jat - Omnaram and Kanaram began constructing a water reservoir on this land - now rightfully belonging to Ratnaram and cut - down a few Khejditrees when the owner Ratnaram objected to this, the two allegedly fled from the place after threatening him and his whole family. On this Ratnaram went to the police - station to file an FIR, but the Station House Office [SHO] of Medta police station did not think that the matter was serious. On April 15, Ratnaram got a Magistrates order to file an FIR. The FIR was registered on May 1. On April 20, Ratnaram's widowed daughter- in - law alleged that she had been molested by Chimnaram's sons; this complaint of hers too was not taken cognizance of. Again a Magistrates order was required for the police to register an FIR. Despite her statement recorded under section 164 of the code of criminal procedure, no arrests were made. Constructing of dwelling like - a Pakka- House and a Kachha- Hut on that piece of land by Meghwals and the counter claims made by Jats that the piece of land originally owned by Bastiram Meghwal had been sold to Chimnaram Jat in 1964. But according to the section 42 of the 1955 - Rajasthan Tenancy Act, property owned by a member of a Scheduled Caste [S.C.] community cannot be transferred or sold to a person from another community including Scheduled Tribes. "It says the policy of state contained in section 42 of the Act placing restrictions on the transfer of land by persons belonging to SC or ST's is in the interest of such person and it cannot be allowed to be frustrated although a person belonging to a SC or ST may be a party to such transfer unwillingly or otherwise. The disability imposed on the Khatedars of SC's or ST's may not be able to alienate their land to non- sc's classes is absolute and in their long interest as group of weak persons. It is a legal provision to ensure securing the ends of a considered public policy". Had the departments Revenue or Land records not prevaricated on settling the issue of ownership and title, the bloodshed could have been avoided. The untold story about bloodshed went like- according to First Information Report [FIR] a mob of around 200 Jats, chased them, beat them mercily with sharp objects, set fire to their possessions- including trolleys and razed a brick dwelling that had been constructed on the field. Three people died on spot and the others succumbed to their wounds in hospital. The dead and injured were run over with tractors. Tractors normally used on fields for agriculture, were now employed to crush the unarmed Dalits and in the demonic attack, 3 - Dalits were crushed and died instantly. Amongst those died was a Labour Leader Pokaram, who had in fact come to the Village that very day to meet his brother Ganpat - Meghwal. Pokaram's assassination was perhaps the most brutal; he was crushed under the tractor, his private parts injured and burning pieces of wood inserted into his eyes. "They descended on us like Animals. Even animals are not treated like this said Arjun Meghwal-whose father and brother were killed. His mother Bidami, was admitted to Hospital with with fractured Arms". The women were molested their private parts were targeted and injured in this demonic attack. Dhanwari whose father -in- law was killed and who herself was admitted to hospital with fracture told Frontline that the attackers molested the women. "I was hit on the head. I remember someone holding my arms and legs. I fainted after that. They hit us whenever they could she, "said her children had gone to school and for them and few others except the entire family was in the field when the mob came attacking". Over all in this attack, 5 people were killed [1 died subsequently on 23rd of May at the Hospital], 12 whose limbs were broken. 1 tractor – trolley and 4 - motorcycles set to fire. One house attacked another kachha hut set to fire, property from these places stolen. For about an hour this war - this dance of death raged on. The village was reportedly mobilized to teach Meghwal a lesson. Rampaul Gosain was called especially to join the 'Mela' as one of his relatives described it. "This was the third such meeting that he had been called for in the past two months. He said that he would be back for launch. But only we got his body. It was a village matter. How could he have refused to join? It was only to 'explain' to Meghwals that the crowd had assembled. We had nothing to do with them. They are jats 'we are Gosains, "she said. However, the Meghwals were never called to these meetings, she added.

Responses of Authorities

Nagaur Police and Administration have been attempting to play down the crime by describing it as a bloody land – dispute that ended in war. The local Dalits of the Area say that those set the Dalit women on fire could not be identified. The other cases could not be preceded against either because in all the cases the perpetrators of these crimes were jats. To make things worse the administration too is composed of mostly jats. Here the police

Thanedar, the Tehsildar are Jats and the Politicians too serve the Jat interests. How would these people in office act against members of their own community? Over years this subordination continues and nobody dares to raise a voice against the Jats. If someone does their voice is quickly silenced. "In spite of the existence of Rajasthan Tenancy Act, section 42 [b] which governs land laws for Dalits, most of the Dalits land continues transactions, whenever, asks for land rights, he is silenced by the mafias. Both the communities have filed FIR, s. Both the FIR, s provides us with much information.

Conclusion

To conclude I can say that if one were to examine the kind of atrocities perpetrated in Dangawas region ones heart would scream out. It is hard to believe that independent India is host to such crimes today. Such brutality and cruelty of unimaginable proportions inflicted by one community on another might even put terrorist groups to shame! Is this possible even in a democratic state. Apparently yes! With the political and administrative system that initially refused to even take notice of the happenings. Had the departments Revenue or Land records not prevaricated on settling the issue of ownership and title, the bloodshed could have been `avoided.

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