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## Untouchability in Chennai? Yes, shows survey

CHENNAI: If you ever thought that untouchability is a rural phenomenon, please wait. Caste definitely has its shadow over metropolitan Chennai, where discrimination is prevalent in different forms - both subtle and otherwise, if one were to go by an ongoing survey.

Though many members of the Schedule Castes have migrated to the state capital and some of them have even progressed economically, Dalits still face unique forms of discrimination and atrocities at various levels, according to the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front, which is conducting the first of its kind survey to map 'urban untouchability'.

For instance, a senior government officer was asked to vacate a flat in upscale Anna Nagar after his landlord came to know that the tenant was a Dalit. And that ended their cordiality.

In many uppercaste households, Dalit housemaids are barred from entering certain parts of the house like kitchen or prayerroom. "Dalits are made to just do the dishes, wash clothes and clean bathrooms," points out P Sampath, president of the Front.

He says the survey initially carried 36 queries, most of them referring to specific forms of discrimination. But now the questions have gone up to 50, as newer forms of discrimination are reported by the people surveyed.

The need for the survey, conducted in 30 specific pockets with dense Dalit population, was felt when the members of the Front visited a few slums to mobilise support for agitations. Basic amenities elude slums because they are mostly populated by SC members, he adds.

The Front will release the final results with figures and a list of forms of discrimination in a few days. It had earlier done a similar survey in rural Tamil Nadu and identified 85 forms of discrimination and 23 forms of atrocities practised against Dalits.

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