

Caste Extracts from the US State Department 2015 report on India

US State Department 2015 India Report – Caste Extracts

‘The most significant human rights problems involved police and security force abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and rape; corruption remained widespread and contributed to ineffective responses to crimes, including those against women, children, and members of scheduled castes or tribes; and societal violence based on gender, religious affiliation, and caste or tribe.’(p.1)

‘Traditionally, large segments of society are organized into castes or clans. Caste is a complex social hierarchy system that traditionally determines ritual purity and occupation. The constitution in 1949 prohibits caste discrimination. The registration of castes and tribes continued for the purpose of affirmative action programs, as the government implements programs to empower members of the low castes. The law gives the president authority to identify disadvantaged castes and tribes for special quotas and benefits. Discrimination based on caste remained prevalent particularly in rural areas. According to a 2014 survey by the Indian National Council of Applied Economic Research and the University of Maryland, 27 percent of Indian households practice caste-based untouchability, with the highest untouchability practices found in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh.’ (p.53-54)

‘The term “Dalit,” derived from the Sanskrit for “oppressed” or “crushed,” refers to members of what society regarded as the lowest Hindu castes, the SC. Many SC members continued to face impediments to the means of social advancement, including education, jobs, access to justice, freedom of movement, and access to institutions and services. According to the 2011 census, SC members constituted 16.6 percent (approximately 200 million persons) of the population. The Ministry of Home Affairs’ 2013-14 annual report noted 33,655 cases of registered crimes against SC members in 2012, compared with 32,719 cases in 2011.

Although the law protects Dalits, there were numerous reports of violence and significant discrimination in access to services, such as health care, education, temple attendance, and marriage. Many Dalits were malnourished.’ (p.54)

‘Poor health infrastructure disproportionately affected marginalized women, including homeless women, tribal women, women working on tea estates or in the informal labor sector, Dalit women, and women with disabilities.’ (p.46)

“Sumangali schemes” affected an estimated 120,000 young women. These plans, named after the Tamil word for “happily married woman,” are a form of bonded labor in which young women or girls work to earn money for a dowry to be able to marry. The promised lump-sum compensation, often ranging from 50,000 to 70,000 rupees (\$750 to \$1,050), is withheld until the end of three to five years of employment. Compensation, however, sometimes went partially or entirely unpaid. While in bonded labor, employers reportedly subjected women to serious workplace abuses, severe restrictions on freedom of movement and communication, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, and death. The majority of sumangali-bonded laborers came from the SCs, and of those, employers subjected Dalits--the lowest-ranking Arunthathiyars--to additional abuse. Authorities did not allow trade unions in sumangali factories, and some sumangali workers reportedly did not report

abuses due to fear of retribution. A 2014 case study by NGO Vaan Muhil described health problems among workers and working conditions reportedly involving physical and sexual exploitation.’ (p.41)

‘Most bonded laborers were Dalits. Dalits who asserted their rights were often victims of attacks, especially in rural areas’. As agricultural laborers for higher-caste landowners, Dalits reportedly often worked without monetary remuneration. Reports from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination described systematic abuse of Dalits, including extrajudicial killings and sexual violence against Dalit women. Crimes committed against Dalits reportedly often went unpunished, either because authorities failed to prosecute perpetrators or because victims did not report crimes due to fear of retaliation.’ (p.54)

‘On June 24, attackers beheaded V. Gokulraj, a Dalit engineer, in Pallipalayam, Tamil Nadu, reportedly due to a romantic relationship with an upper caste Hindu classmate. Police arrested 12 suspects, but the primary suspect, a local caste leader, remained at large. The case was pending.’ (p.42)

‘Women in conflict areas, such as in Jammu and Kashmir, the northeast, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh, as well as vulnerable Dalit or tribal women, were often victims of rape or threats of rape. National crime statistics indicated that, compared with other caste affiliations, assailants most often perpetrated rape against Dalit women.’ (p.39)

‘There was a five-fold increase in reported rape incidents against Dalit women in Gujarat from 2001-14, according to the state government.’ (p.56)

‘NGOs reported widespread discrimination, including prohibiting Dalits from walking on public pathways, wearing footwear, accessing water from public taps in upper-caste neighbourhoods, participating in some temple festivals, bathing in public pools, or using certain cremation grounds.

NGOs reported that Dalit students were sometimes denied admission to certain schools because of their caste or required them to present caste certification prior to admission. There were reports that school officials barred Dalit children from morning prayers, asked Dalit children to sit in the back of the class, or forced them to clean school toilets while denying them access to the same facilities. There were also reports that teachers refused to correct the homework of Dalit children, refused to provide midday meals to Dalit children, and asked Dalit children to sit separately from children of upper-caste families.’ (p.54)

‘The federal and state governments continued to implement programs for SC members to provide better-quality housing, reserved seats in schools, government jobs, and access to subsidized foods, but critics claimed many of these programs suffered from poor implementation and/or corruption.’ (p.55)

‘The constitution stipulates that to protect historically marginalized groups and provide for representation in the lower house of parliament, each state must reserve seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in proportion to their population in the state. <...>Some Christians and Muslims were identified as Dalits, but the government limited reservations for Dalits to Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains. In March a Dalit woman was elected Deputy Chief of Panchayat in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh. Angered by her election, men from the village beat her and her family and forced her to eat cow dung.’ (p.34)

‘Manual scavenging--the removal of animal or human waste by Dalits--continued in spite of its legal prohibition. NGO activists claimed elected village councils employed a majority of manual

scavengers and belonged to Other Backward Classes and Dalit populations. The media regularly published articles and pictures of persons cleaning manholes and sewers without protective gear.

Human Rights Watch reported that children of manual scavengers faced discrimination, humiliation, and segregation at village schools. Their occupation often exposed manual scavengers to infections that affected their skin, eyes, respiratory, and gastrointestinal systems. Health practitioners suggested that children exposed to such bacteria were often unable to maintain a healthy body weight and suffered from stunted growth.

The law prohibits the employment of scavengers or the construction of dry (nonflush) latrines, and penalties range from imprisonment for up to one year, a fine of 2,000 rupees (\$30), or both. Nonetheless, Indian Railways often violated the laws without consequence. The state-owned company acknowledged that it fitted approximately 30,000 passenger coaches with open-discharge toilets, "forcing" the railways to employ manual scavengers to clean the tracks. The railways proposed to install sealed toilet systems but without a fixed timeline for implementation. On March 4, the Bombay High Court reprimanded the Maharashtra state government for failing to end the practice of manual scavenging. Maharashtra led the country with 63,713 households engaged in manual scavenging, based on Socio-Economic Caste Census data released on July 3. On August 7, the Maharashtra government started a new survey of state sanitary latrines that require manual cleaning.

On August 15, during a dispute over a religious procession, a mob of more than 200 upper-caste Vanniars attacked a community of more than 80 Dalit families in Seshasamuthiram, Tamil Nadu. The mob reportedly threw gasoline bombs, destroying a religious structure, burning 15 homes, and injuring eight police officers. Police reportedly arrested 68 persons involved in the incident. Arsonattacks destroyed two more Dalit houses and two sugarcane fields in Seshasamuthiram on September 2.' (p.55-56)

'According to the Asian Human Rights Commission, although the Supreme Court ordered enforcement of the 2013 Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act and banned the manual cleaning of sewage lines, authorities rarely implemented the act and manual scavenging persisted. The commission quoted a Dalit rights activist who asserted that at least 700 deaths in manholes occurred across the country every year.' (p.67)

'There were incidents of discrimination and abuse against Dalits in the country's prison system.' (p.56)