

think!

THE BIG STORY

CASTE & THE CITY

URBAN BIASES India got a rap recently for being unable to contain caste discrimination. A look at how the country – not just in rural, but also in urban areas – is unable to free itself from the shackles of the shameful C-word

CASTE AFFECTS ALL SPHERES OF LIFE

While in urban areas old caste biases are being diluted, newer ones are taking hold. "Reservation is creating resentment because people see benefits extended to those who've become upper/middle class due to quotas," says Dipankar Gupta. One suggestion, he says, is: "A periodic recalibration of quotas."

1 LAW & ENFORCEMENT

- The Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act 1955 – An act to prescribe punishment for the 1 [preaching and practice of "Untouchability"] for the enforcement of any disability arising therefrom for matters connected therewith.
- The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities): POA Act, 1989 – An act to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against members of Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, to provide for special courts for the trial of such offences [...]
- National Commissions
 - The first commission for SCs & STs was set up in August 1978.
 - In 1987, the Commission for SCs & STs was renamed as the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It was set up as a National Level Advisory Body to advise the government on policy issues and development of SCs&STs.
 - The statutory National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes came into being after the passing of the Constitution (sixty fifth Amendment) Bill, 1990
 - Constitution (89th Amendment act) 2003 came into force in 2004 – the erstwhile National Commission for Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes was replaced by (1) National Commission for Scheduled Castes and (2) National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.
 - May 16, 2012: Parliament passed a Bill that seeks to exempt some central institutions from implementing the other backward castes quota where it exceeds the 50% reservation limit set by the SC. The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Amendment Bill, 2012, was passed by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha on May 16.
 - May 14, 2012: LS Speaker Meira Kumar said, "It's an irrefutable truth that democracy and caste system can't go hand in hand."
 - June 6, 2012, Jaipur: Alleging that the Rajasthan govt was 'ignoring' the Gujjars and other castes' reservation issue, Gujjar leader KS Bainsla began a 'sit-in' in Sawaimadhopur.

Compiled By: SAMAR KHURSHID

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Hardly anyone seems to have paid attention to India's dismal showing at the UN Human Rights Council's universal periodic review when the latter alleged that India is "all words, no action" on working against caste and related discrimination. The allegations are built around, among other things, data from the National Crime Records Bureau, which says, "Atrocities against Dalit women include: Verbal abuse and sexual epithets, naked parading, pulling out of teeth, tongue and nails, and violence, including murder. Dalit women are also threatened by rape as part of collective violence by higher castes." The review is startling also because it alleges that over 160 million Indians continue to endure caste-based persecution.

The number and allegations are severe but didn't register more than a blip on the national media's radar. The common perception is that even that may have slipped the average urban Indian's attention because he doesn't often think about caste and is only vaguely aware of the identity that his family name endows him with. Discrimination based on caste happens in those back of beyond villages. Cities, meanwhile, are too economically motivated to be affected by it. Or that's what we'd like to think.

Caste is alive in Indian cities. Discrimination, though subtle, exists too though alongside things are changing. Says André Béteille, professor emeritus of sociology, Delhi University: "The growth and expansion of a new middle class, attendant on demographic, technological and economic changes is altering the operation of caste."

Caste in cities continues to show up in everything from its oldest bastions – marriage – to new ways in issues related to employment and education. This, despite the fact that the central premise behind caste-based marriage – maintenance of the gene pool – has been debunked by science along the way. For instance, ongoing research by the Institute of Genomics & Integrative Biology, as quoted by Patrick French in his book India: A Portrait, reveals that "upper-caste Hindus seem to be much closer to Muslims than other higher castes from other places" and that "the caste system has no genetic basis".

The other caste bastion – occupation – though affected, is showing resistance. "In certain professions, especially academia and media, recruitment of lower-caste candidates is discouraged by the higher-ups. There is a fear of new opinions coming in conflict with existing thought. This resistance is also seen in art, cinema and the sciences – all influential professional spheres," says Chandra Bhan Prasad, a self-trained anthropologist and the first Dalit to have a regular column in an English daily.

Still, caste is in the process of being undermined as the economics of their situation forces people to work together disregarding caste. "Once there weren't enough worldly goods to own and people thought more about life after death. Now, they think, 'if I am without a good car or an AC, I am in hell'. The fear of hell within their lifetime is greater than the fear of hell after," Prasad jests.

Notions of pollution, however, prevail. Mari Marcel Thekaekara, a human rights activist and writer based in Gudalur, Tamil Nadu, says "in an upper middle-class Maharashtrian (mixed-caste) building in Worli, a bai told my daughter her's is the only family that doesn't keep a separate glass for the bai.

But where caste has inadvertently become prominent in urban environs is in the form of relative deprivation – a feeling of being deprived of what one believes oneself to be entitled to – arising from the reservation policies of the Indian government (even though they have done a lot of good – for example, 13% of IAS officers now are from lower castes, as opposed to none at the time of Independence). A feeling of resentment seems to be simmering for some time among people of the general category. "A periodic recalibration of reservation quotas is needed to tackle new resentments," says sociologist and former JNU academic Dipankar Gupta. On the other hand, people of various lower castes – who wouldn't otherwise dream of even having a meal with each other – are mingling for a common aim. "These people are coming together – under a caste-based umbrella – for a non-caste based aim," one that is economically driven "for social assets like education," says Gupta.

So, while urbanisation is undermining the dehumanising phenomena of caste, social notions are being chipped away far more slowly.

Caste is each of the hereditary classes of Hindu society, distinguished by relative degrees of ritual purity or pollution & of social status. Any class or group of people who inherit exclusive privileges or are perceived as socially distinct
— Oxford Dictionary of English

2 EDUCATION

RESERVATION Caste in central government funded higher education institutions, 22.5% of available seats are reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST). This percentage has been raised to 49.5% by including an additional 27% reservation for OBCs. This ratio is followed even in Parliament and all elections where a few constituencies are earmarked for those from certain communities (which keeps rotating as per the Delimitation Commission).

'DON'T WANT DALIT COOKS'

UP: Resident of Ramabai Nagar in UP, Shashi Pratap Singh, withdrew his daughter from primary school last year. The shocking reason he gives is that he didn't want her to eat the mid-day meal prepared by dalit cooks. "The two communities are socially incompatible," is his explanation. Challenging the government's move to employ dalit cooks in government schools, he argues for having "upper-caste people to supervise the cooking". Authorities didn't pay any heed. In turn, Singh's kids and also, he claims, others, boycotted the food. So hell-bent were they on their unreasonable demand, that Singh claims his kids and others dropped out and went to private schools. — Haider Naqvi

'CLASS DIVIDED OVER CASTE'

MUMBAI: "I'm 27 and a BMC health officer. Six years ago, when I came to Mumbai from Osmanabad, I was excited about studying at one of the city's best medical colleges. That changed soon as I realised there is a clear division between students from backward castes who get seats through reservations and those admitted in the open category. Upper caste students would taunt us about this. We tried to complain but the professors ignored us. To make matters worse, in 2006 there were protests against reservations in Delhi. Our class became even more divided. It's better outside college. But I still suspect patients avoid me because they can tell my caste from my surname." — As told to Prachi Pinglay

3 POLITICS

Politics in India may not be explained entirely in terms of caste. But caste influences political activity from gram panchayat right up to Parliament. If you have the numbers in legislature, you make it to power. Caste equations can blur issues of governance. Caste is an underlying factor that keeps politicians in competitive engagement. In the 1990s, the Mandal agitation's impact saw new parties like Janata Dal, SP and RJD rise, claiming support of backward castes. BSP became the voice of dalits. The Congress and BJP resorted to caste re-engineering for more MPs. BJP's Bangaru Laxman became the first dalit president of a major national party. But, he was filmed taking

'CASTE EQUATIONS CAN BLUR GOVERNANCE ISSUES'

money, ending his career and the BJP's plans to expand voter base. Cut to the present. In Karnataka, Yeddyurappa's rebellion against the BJP high command is tolerated because he commands the loyalty of his community, Lingayats. In Andhra Pradesh, the Congress battles a rebel, YS Jaganmohan Reddy, who has a good number of Reddy MLAs with him. But you cannot stay in power with only your own caste's support. You need others too. Bihar's Nitish Kumar cannot upset that apple cart, which requires a coalition with the BJP. So when Ranvir Sena chief Brahmeshwar Singh was gunned down, upper caste men went on a rampage. A hapless state government let their anger

dissipate rather than crack down. That's because Kumar has crafted a social engineering that marries extremely backward classes, maha dalits and upper castes, giving him the mandate twice. Like Kumar's caste engineering, the success of Samajwadi in UP in this year's polls is owed to its ability to keep intact its base of Yadavs and Muslims but also win over other communities. That was because Mayawati's sarva samaj (inclusion of all castes) approach run aground in her tenure as CM. Her administration's pro-dalit bias led to her community asserting themselves against other castes, forcing Brahmins and Rajputs to embrace SP just to oust BSP. — Shekhar Iyer

4 JOBS

The percentage of reservation in direct recruitment on all India basis by open competition for SCs and STs is 15% and 7.5% respectively. Direct recruitment on all India basis otherwise than by open competition reservation for SCs and STs is 16.66% and 7.5% respectively. 3rd October 2000 - relaxations and concessions in the matter of promotion were restored to SCs and STs

- Relaxations in direct recruitment -**
1. Relaxation in upper age limit by 5 years
 2. Exemption from payment of examination/application fees
 3. In the interview for recruitment process, SC/ST candidates should be interviewed separately
 4. Qualifications regarding experience can be relaxed at the discretion of the competent authority/UPSC

5. Standards of suitability can be relaxed
Reservation in promotion Ban on de-reservation in direct recruitment. If reserved vacancies are not filled by the SC/ST communities, seats cannot be filled by those not belonging to these communities

Reservation in corporate jobs: May 2005: The then newly-elected president of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) YC Deveshwar stated that India Inc was not in favour of quotas for SC/STs in the private sector. "Nobody (from the industry) has agreed to job reservation," he said. Deveshwar insisted there would be loss in competitiveness if the quota system was thrust upon the private sector. "Only through advancing competitiveness in the companies can more jobs be created."

'THEY DISMISS MY WORK'

MUMBAI: "I'm 35 and teaching music at a BMC school in Mumbai for the past seven years. Two months ago, I was shortlisted to be promoted. Since then some colleagues have been telling people that I've been selected only because I'm from the backward class. On several occasions they have even told me the same thing. But they don't take into account that I'm one of the few people in the music department who holds a post graduate degree. It hurts me when they dismiss my hard work and educational qualifications and focus on the caste and the background that I belong to. My question is, why don't people look down on those who pay money for their seats in college?" — As told to Riddhi Doshi

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5 MARRIAGE

SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT Provides for inter-caste marriage (as an alternative to the Hindu Marriage Act)

MATRIMONIALS Matrimonial ads are an

indicator of biases. In HT edition of June 3, 2012, here's the break-up of ads:

Caste-based ads:	647
MBA/Doctors/CA/Prof	56
NRI:	56
Others:	76

'WE'RE FIGHTING OUR OWN PEOPLE'

GURGAON: "For over nine years my family and I (Ramratan Baliyan) are on the run. Our fault was that we supported the court marriage of our youngest son Vidhu (name changed) with Lakshmi (name changed) of same gotra of the same khap. Hell broke loose as khap leaders sent a word to boycott us. Our house and shop in village Goela in Muzaffarnagar were torched. We fled and shifted base to Gurgaon. It was a herculean task to earn our livelihood in a new city. We continued our battle against the excess of our own men on the name of 'culture and tradition'. Meanwhile, Vidhu became an auto driver and his wife Lakshmi runs a parlour from home to raise their 4-year-old son." — as told to S Raju



1 My employer insults & abuses me, but I have no option but to be a maid in that house.

4 A sarkari naukri gives security but so many seats are reserved, you think I can get the job?

2 It's mom-dad's dream I study medicine in this college. But who wants to be taunted for their caste after using quota to get in?

3 See, we have to be practical. Let's give the ticket to a candidate from the dominant caste. We're sure to win.

5 My brother's seen me in the pub with you. Now we have no option but to elope.

THINK CASTE BIAS IS NOT PROMINENT IN CITIES? HERE'S HOW IT PLAYS OUT IN URBAN & RURAL AREAS

URBAN	HOME	COMMUNITY	SOCIETY	HOME	COMMUNITY	SOCIETY	RURAL
	Moderate In the privacy of homes, many people will not eat or drink from the same utensils as household help. "Definite caste-based discrimination here," says Prasad.	Subtle Neighbours are determined by our economic status, as are colleagues we interact with at work. Here there is more class consciousness, not so much caste bias.	Moderate In cities, law enforcement is higher than in rural areas, but political decisions that affect urban jobs and higher education have led to clashes and resentment.	High While the caste bias against help is within the privacy of four walls in cities, it is out in the quite open in villages, with lower castes not even being allowed into homes.	High Notions of defilement are strong. Caste determines not only who comes into the home, but where one lives. In many places, Dalits are forced to live outside the village.	High Constitutional laws have less prominence than informal councils, like khaps which, being kangaroo courts, lay down their own laws based on caste segregation.	

*The above graphic represents how caste dynamics play out in urban Indian societies. It has been created in consultation with sociological experts who between them have more than 60 years of study, research and teaching of the Indian caste system