

Statement from IDS^N to the 13th session of the UN Minority Forum
November 2020

What is Caste-Hate Speech?

1. Caste-Hate Speech can be defined as Hate speech where it takes the form of communication such as speech, writings, behaviour, codes, signs, and memes that manifests hierarchies, invokes humiliation, incites discrimination, degrades self-worth and perpetuates discrimination. It is often the source of physical, mental and material violence to a person or a group based on caste identity – in particular those who identify or are identified as Dalits.

Why Caste-Hate Speech should be addressed?

2. Caste-hate speech works on two levels – one it has been able to uphold the supremacy of the oppressor or dominant caste (also called upper caste) and second it has continued the consciousness of the oppressed caste (also called lower caste) especially Dalits in accepting their inferior status as the natural system of orders.
3. Caste-hate speech abusers usually position themselves in caste-in groups and caste-outgroups. Caste-Hate Speech alters the social environment for Dalits in a significant way, it can make them feel inherently inferior, incapable, incompetent and inept which is reinforced in a myriad of ways.
4. Caste-hate slurs, insults, incitements and objectionable insinuations make Dalits extremely vulnerable in socio-cultural situations. Dalits get conditioned to believe that they are worthy of being suppressed, exploited and dominated. Dalits may also internalise the superior position of dominant or oppressor caste people subconsciously justifying their abuse and oppression.
5. Dalit women are particular targets as they often encounter misogynistic hate and gendered stereotypes as well as those related to her caste.
6. Caste-hate speech has resulted in a “culture of silence”, making Dalits passive, subservient and psychologically powerless. Caste-hate speech is a direct result of the attitudes and behaviour of the dominant caste.
7. Caste-hate speech further aggravates the flawed discriminatory notions and images of Dalits as being less than human and fit only for menial jobs. It also hints at, more often than not, that Dalits are engaged in anti-social and criminal activities. Caste-hate speech perpetuates the belief that the privileged/dominant castes enjoys impunity and are convinced that they cannot be wrong.
8. Caste-hate speech often escalates into violence, atrocities and attacks on Dalits and Dalit communities and is a key precursor to hate crime.

Caste-Hate Speech in Online and Digital Spaces

9. Print and Television media houses in South Asian societies are mostly owned and controlled by families of more privileged/dominant castes. Dalits are under-represented in South Asian or National Media houses – and are unlikely to be seen in management teams and never in the Boardrooms.

10. Millions of Dalits worldwide suffer from the hidden apartheid of segregation, exclusion and discrimination and this gets further reflected and reinforced in online and digital spaces. The online and digital space has further exacerbated, and fuelled caste hate drivers. The quantity, frequency and velocity of hate speech used against Dalits in online space is vast.
11. Social Media Platforms are presently echoing the practice of discrimination and hatred that the dominant caste people hold against Dalits in South Asia. Organised groups work on creating a really strong negative public discourse including the derision of affirmative policies that seek to ensure fair representation of Dalits and advocating for the repeal of special legislations which ensures protection and prevention of caste-based atrocities.
12. This kind of a public discourse is both strategic as well dangerous and will be used to propagate change in the government policies deeming them falsely to be ineffective and counter discriminatory. Social media platforms need to include and reinforce work addressing caste-hate speech.
13. The internet however can also be viewed as a great equalizer since online and digital space with respect to social media platforms provide a level playing field to everyone. Dalits who were unable to find their own spaces and voices in the mainstream media space found an alternative space for political participation. This change has led to the organic growth of independent Dalit media outlets that have come to produce their own contents.
14. Dalit women, who were long subjugated by twin oppressions of caste and gender, found a voice on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. However, Dalits are still underrepresented on these platforms.

Recommendations

- Acknowledge and recognize that caste is a protected characteristic in all international covenants related to hate-speech and human rights
- Recognize caste-hate speech is a distinctive form of hate that merits attention from and by international fora such as the UN and EU as well as INGOs and other actors.
- Advocate that digital tech corporations should be sensitive to growing online caste-hate speech and support measures to address this are incorporated into corporate human rights due diligence processes and requirements.
- Ensure Dalits are involved in the analysis of hate speech evaluation, moderation of online content and shaping of policies to address caste-hate speech
- Assessment and evaluation of hate speech moderation/online content should be made transparent.
- Educate fact-checkers and content moderators about caste-hate speech to mitigate casteism online.
- Undertake studies on caste-hate speech in digital spaces to propose new mechanisms to mitigate caste abuse

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Intervention for 13th Session - Forum on Minority Issues, 19 Nov 2020 - 20 Nov 2020

Item 2: Causes, scale and impact of hate speech targeting minorities in social media