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Caste bias against dalits not down: CJI

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NEW DELHI: In what could raise serious concerns over the working of the 60-year-old reservation system to uplift the dalits, Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan on Sunday said caste prejudices had not come down against the dalits.

Reflecting on his journey from a dalit boy to the post of CJI, Justice Balakrishnan said it had not been an easy road for him. Asked whether in the present day, a similarly placed dalit boy would have a smoother journey, the CJI said, "It will still be difficult."

Speaking to TOI, Justice Balakrishnan said, "The prejudices are on the increase. It may not be visible on the surface, for the prejudices are more sophisticated now." This remark from the CJI puts in question the efficacy of the current system of reservation for Scheduled Caste population through the Presidential Order of 1950 to compensate them for the centuries of oppression at the hands of upper castes.

But the CJI was not bitter as he looked back on the eve of completing three years in the top post, just five months away from his retirement. "I have suffered caste prejudices. But at the same time, so many people have helped me irrespective of their caste," he added.

In fact, the Supreme Court in April 2006 had issued notices to the Centre and all states on a PIL filed by an NGO — 'National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights' (NCDHR) — citing 20 common instances of indifference of police and authorities that had rendered the SCs and STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, a dead piece of legislation. The PIL had sought as many as 28 different directions for the proper implementation of the 17-year-old Act.

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