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The vast poor majority remains oppressed to the emerging fascist forces. They are brutalised by the caste system, the 'culture of impunity' and the hydra-headed tortures. Dr. Lenin Raghuvanshi shows how the Neo-Dalit Movement needs to emerge and eradicate the age-old problem, following the Mandela model.



India is one of the world's oldest living civilisations with a vibrant culture and diversity of its people and languages. Paradoxically, this enormous diversity also hides a dark and sinister side in the shadows of its culture, the caste system. Embedded in the feudal culture, based on the mind of the caste for several centuries, the Hindu caste system is one of the world's longest surviving forms of social stratification. It divides the society into social classes or castes. This graded inequality has the sanction of classical Indian religious scriptures.

Piquantly, the caste hierarchy dictates the lives of its citizens even today. The tribal, Muslims and the lower castes or untouchable communities face discrimination and severe oppression due to their social status. As a result, they have been further marginalised in the society and denied their basic rights.

Despite the fact that untouchability was officially banned, when India adopted its constitution in 1950, discrimination against the lower castes and Musahar is all pervasive. In order to prevent discrimination based on caste and religion, the government passed legislation, in 1989, known as, 'The Prevention of Atrocities Act'. The act specifically made it illegal to parade people naked through the streets, force them to eat faeces, take away their land, foul their water, interfere with their right to vote, and burn down their homes. Many of the youngest in the community are not allowed admissions in the schools since the upper castes do not want their children to study along with the Musahar children. Since then, the violence has escalated largely as a result of the emergence of a grassroots human rights movement among Musahar to demand their rights and resist the dictates of untouchability.

The severest human rights violations in India, the widespread use of custodial torture, are closely linked to caste-based discrimination. In the context of crime investigation, suspects are tortured to enforce confessions. Due to the absence of an independent agency to investigate cases, complaints are often not properly proofed and perpetrators are never prosecuted and punished. The discrimination of women and gender based violence, which includes domestic violence, dowry linked violence, acid attacks, sexual assault, sexual harassment and sex-selective abortion, are the most relevant human rights issues in India.

Culture of Impunity

The main problems facing the country emerge from two things: the implementation of a 'culture of impunity', which is a shared belief that few can act without be accountable for their actions, at the social, economic and political level and the cognitive problem in the context of market democracy and economic globalisation. This explanation reveals how the combination of those two factors – cognitive and contextual – allow the rise of a Neo-Fascism state – an authoritarian state, which wants to make one country with one nation – and the implementation of an aggressive Neo-Liberal capitalism – which perpetuate social and economic injustice. In this way, we would see how the Neo-fascist Hindutva project is used to perpetuate caste domination and allow the Indian leaders to realise profit by selling the country to national and international companies. Furthermore, we understand how this economic deregulation marginalised lower castes, and therefore, strengthened social division based on castes.

Thereafter, we propose a way to correct and change this situation by calling for the creation of a 'Neo-Dalit' movement– combining Shudras and ati-Shudras from all regions, which would formulate popular movement against the 'culture of impunity' through mobilisation of opinion among leaders from all communities.



The multifaceted problems of our country are interconnected. In order to understand and solve these, we must view the dire problem in totality, not in isolation. We need a comprehensive multi-layer and multi-dimensional approach that takes into account economic, cultural, political and social factors. The People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR) and its partners are actively attempting to fill this opportunity space by courting constructive dialogue with others, all stripes, spots and ideological leanings. Focusing on the diversity of caste experience, rather than being counter-intuitive to movement goals of creating Dalit self-esteem represents a primary step toward creating lasting structural change in the process of strengthening Dalit self-esteem.

Multidisciplinary Approach: for Actors and Factors

India has one of the highest GDP rates of the world. As a 'developing economy' in a global world-wide economy, the country tries more and more to immerse itself in the international market for goods and capital. This amazing economic growth is beautifully accompanied by the establishment of democracy, and seems to make India a paradise-under-construction. But this lovely facade hides many inappropriate practices such as poverty, brutality and destruction of nature. Let's review these practices in the context of economic policies.

We may describe Indian economic policy as a conversion to the Neo-Liberalism religion with a brutal 'shut up', steeped in ritualisation. On one hand, politicians use India as a reservoir of raw materials. They allow big corporation to exploit nature, and destroy the fragile ecosystem, which allows rural people to live, as they have been doing since ages. They sell the entire national key infrastructure – such as water, electricity, health, telecommunication, transport, education, natural resources to private companies to make money through corrupt practices. This privatisation

process of state and land is strongly encouraged by Neo-Liberalist global institutions – as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.



On the other hand, such practices of piracy against people – who are dispossessed of the wealth of their country by political and economic leaders – are perpetrated through by authoritarian and violent measures that government takes against people, who resist, and in the power-that-be's lingo, try to mutiny against this spoliation. Police uses torture, army is called to crush the innocent citizens, who dare to speak the truth. The state machinery that is supposed to defend people and the hazardous legislation make them safe from any penalty for the violation of human rights are enacted – as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Armed Forces Special Power Act, which are used more against people, who dare to criticise these policies than against dreaded terrorists. During that time, other legal texts are enacted to protect and attract multinational companies to provide them fiscal and legal advantages on a very broad definition of what we call the 'free market'– as the Nuclear Civil Liability Bill, which limits liabilities of Transnational Companies (TNC) from nuclear industrial disasters.

Thus, Indian leaders create a good 'investment climate' for big corporations. They allow these companies to play their dangerous economic game with all the rights and no duties and with a few and controlled popular contestations. This transforms India into a beautiful dream for TNCs, though they pose and remain a daily nightmare for rural and urban workers. Furthermore, we should understand that this situation is dangerous, not only because this seems to foreshadow the establishment of an authoritarian regime, which allows brutal political repression with impunity, but also because this political impunity is put in place alongside with the implementation of an economic policy of corporate impunity.

But this political and economical culture of impunity cannot only be fully understood by the opening of the Indian market to the international one or by the corruptive

practices that plague public and private institutions. Behind those external factors, there is a cognitive reason, which is also very important to understand such behaviours among the actors: the caste system and the mind of the caste.

Indian society has lived for hundreds of years on a strict and rigid social hierarchy based on the Brahmanism stream within Hinduism. The caste system, which so many people see wrongly as concomitant to Hinduism, is a social organisation, which allows upper castes to do whatever they want, including inflicting psychological and physical tortures, to lower castes and women, who are considered inferior because of their birth in low castes. The low castes are forced to accept this supremacy theologically, founded by the gods but actually righting by select human beings to implement an unequal socio-political regime. This belief creates a cognitive complex of inferiority and superiority respectively for the lower and the upper castes. Sadly, it allowed the implementation of a national culture of caste and social impunity, perpetuated by a culture of silence created by fear, pain and lack of self-esteem of the lower castes.

But the story doesn't stop here, because all these 'cultures of impunity', which allows a minority group to govern and exploit the majority can be partly questioned by civil society organisations and protest movements that wish to reverse this cognitive and social pyramid or flatten it. For those reasons, power holders use many means to divide the lower caste majority and divert them from the key issues that face India – through communitarian hatred. They thus ensure their freedom of act as leaders – by enacting draconian laws to 'protect' people from communitarian and acts of terrorism that they create to further their diabolical plans.

Brahminical Power Structure

So, political impunity and economical impunity are two sides of the same coin called



social impunity

Social activists and lower castes, who want to defend the rights of Dalits, tribal and the critics of the system are beaten up by the police and the army, with scant regard for humanity. However, Neo-Liberalism allows upper castes and big corporations to rake profits, because people fight each other on religious issues or because they do not dare to attack the Brahmanical power structure.

This stratified and divisive process of the poor majority, help those who try to keep their power. They use classical methods to conserve their social position. They know that hate begets hate. This is a universal law. And when the government and its leaders begin to feed communal hatred among their own citizens and practice authoritarian political repression, it qualifies as a 'Neo-fascist' state because they implement a national culture of hatred against differences, and love – or at least blind respect – for authority.

There are deeper questions and analysis. Do some political leaders have an interest in creating social divisions to conserve their power? Or is it the true aim of the Hindutva forces to divide people to allow the traditional power structure – the upper castes – to keep ruling the country and continue running their businesses with economic leaders? Or that those who promote genocide and mass killings may do so with impunity and that they are actually rewarded for this?

The example of Gujarat Genocide and the verdict of the 16th parliamentary election in India highlights, loud and clear, that Neo-Fascism and authoritarian Hindutva project, which feeds communal hatred and divides the poor majority are also promoted by the economic leaders to hide the implementation of an economic policy of impunity,

which is supposed to make India as an attractive country for foreign investments and enrich (read gratify) both political and economic leaders.

In the final analysis, we may say that all political repressions, police torture, bureaucratic corruption, economic exploitation of human and nature, and rigid hierarchy of social domination are allowed as much by the implantation of those social, political and economic cognitive cultures of impunity, rather than by external factors. This may be termed as the dangerous cross-currents of Neo-Liberal capitalism and communal Neo-Fascism.

Reformulation of Political Identity

We have seen that all problems, which look apparently different, are actually linked. We will examine how this multiplicity of causes might be overcome by creating a unity process: a people's one.

What is the best way to fight against a Neo-fascist politics of castes and communities divide? The answer is unity. What kind of unity may we create to fight against the deep rooted caste system – which is the origin of social division and cultures of impunity – and Neo-Liberalism that increase the gap between the haves and have-nots and deprives many people of the benefit of natural resources?



First, a union of lower's castes. I mean a union of lower caste from all religions, because misery is beyond theologies. A union between Shudras and ati[1]-Shudras or between Dalits and ati-Dalits, and a union with Muslim lower castes and other marginalised people. A movement of the poor and the abused people for breaking the economic exploitation and the culture of silence of caste torture is another unity. The movement is against Brahmanism and caste system, but not against Hinduism and upper-caste people. The movement is against Neo-Liberalism capitalism, not against democratic capitalism, based on the rule of law, peoples' welfare and pluralism.

Unity of all 'broken people' and progressive people is the best way to fight against this culture of impunity with the norm of exclusion. Because we don't think that change will come from people, who benefit from this system. So, structural change

must only come from the bottom of the social pyramid. I propose to call this movement, 'Neo-Dalit', because this is the Dalit community that has been suffering the most. Moreover, this name is already synonym of the political struggle envisaged by Baba Saheb Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

Of course, to create a sense of belonging to an imagined political inter-caste community seems both daunting and impossible. The caste structure of the society is old and perfectly integrated into the everyday life. This change of identity requires sacrifices from both, the castes and communities. The Shudras must learn to deny their right to lord on the ati-Shudras, if they want to break free from their upper castes masters. On the other hand, the extended reformulation of the term 'Dalit' also requires an ati-Shudra sacrifice, as these take away the monopoly of the first identity that they recognize as legitimate, from the first name that they accept to name themselves. It is a synonym of their political fight. They use first name with a bit of pride.

This integration problem is even greater when we try to include in this movement the 'old' – but actually still – lower castes, who converted to Islam or Christianity.

Sameness of Social Groups

Because of all these difficulties, we have to understand and emphasise the sameness among those different social groups. First, we should make them understand that they are both the castes enslaved and alienated by the upper castes through the caste system. They are a majority that is ruled by a minority, in a country that theoretically became a democracy in 1947. Secondly, we should show them that main economic resources and power is held by the upper castes. There is no sense to fight amongst them but to give a positive answer to communitarian hatred. Such behaviours will not help implement Neo-Dalit conditions.

The classical example of the mind of the caste and its implication that the landless Dalit was fighting with a poor Shudra, owner of small tract of land, because cows of the Dalit were grazing on the fields of the Shudra, destroying the crops, in Belwa village of Varanasi. During that time, the rich upper caste, big landlord often exploited Shudras and ati-Shudras. Hitherto, he never had to deal with this kind of problem, because the caste mentality allowed him to beat the lower castes brutally with impunity. The lower castes, over a period of time, have internalised this brutal domination. They regard it as normal and because the upper castes have police in their pocket. Here, we should explain to the Dalit and the Shudra that this conflict results from their marginalisation that they share together due to the mind of the caste. We should convince them that they share a common problem, which requires a united response.

In this way, a united movement of protest of the poor majority would emerge. They



would be empowered and would have enough power to fight, in a non-violent way, the atrocities of the rich minority. They perceive themselves as invincible for they have not seen any resistance. They thus feel that they are un-attackable. Similarly, fanatic religious leaders, who feed hatred between communities or divide the lower castes, too have not faced any resistance. The story of corrupt officials, who believe that they might usurp and abuse of the rights of poor are much the same. They together form the power structure and create hegemony because they feel that the fragmented communities and castes are powerless. They have no money. The poor would languish lifelong in jails as under trials in false cases. The poor neither have the money nor the unity to fight the corrupt political regime.

The 'divide for better rule' politics has become an institution in the country. A unification process of the lower castes from all religions and further unity with progressive people, born in upper castes, who are against the caste system, is the apt answer. We must create a unified social movement against the decadent Brahmanical caste system and communitarian, based on Neo-Fascism and Neo-Liberal Capitalism.

Three Fights of Neo-Dalits

A union of lower castes against the castes alienation, a union of religions against communitarian, a union of the poor against Neo-Liberalism are the three fights that need to be led by one community, the Neo-Dalits.

But what means of fight should be adopted? How can such social movement of unity emerge? On which kind of struggle should it lead? These questions need to be asked.

The creation of a Neo-Dalit political party doesn't seem to be the right choice. A political party that wants to defend the poor would not be able to raise enough money to play the election games. Leaders who are involved in the institutional game have a better chance to play as per the corruptive rules of those institutions. Though they are supposed to defend the interests of the Dalits, they end up playing the murky game of so-called democracy only for their own profit – as Mayawati (the

BSP Dalit leader) who had a hidden alliance with the RSS. It was a Dalit – Brahmin social engineering that did not attack the evils of the caste system. The reason for this alliance stemmed from her desire to contest for prime minister's office. Many Dalit political leaders joined the BJP and its alliance in the recent parliamentary election, which was backed by the RSS.

It is better to promote a reconciliation movement among different castes and religious communities at the grassroots to create contact among those who have suffered the menace of communitarian and Brahmanism for a long time. Connection and meetings are the best way to fight against dangerous prejudices that lead to community's hatred. It reverses the process of division between lower castes. But it is clear that this unification is no cakewalk. Firstly, we need to create a huge and strong network among all the civil society organisations, who fight separately for the Shudras, ati-Shudras, Muslim, Christian, working classes, farmers, etc. The best way is to achieve this union and create a Neo-Dalit social movement of protest through coordinated actions led by a shared interpretation of our common problems.



For this reason, this present call is for all Shudras and ati-Shudras; to all the organisations that are struggling for human rights and dignity; to all progressive peoples – whatever her/his caste, religion, sex or social class – who want to reverse this process of state-privatisation, abuse of natural resources and division of society through hatred fed by communitarian, feudalism and the patriarchal system implemented by the the Brahmanical caste system and its Hindutva project.

Gandhiji's Conflict Resolution

But the question remains: what is the best way to bring together different social groups? I think that this process should begin by a closer link between opinion leaders and others representative of those groups. This idea has nothing new. Little after India's independence, Gandhiji showed us the way. He demonstrated that it is

possible to stop communalism in a non-violent way. I talk about what people called 'the miracle of Calcutta'. Gandhiji was able to disarm the communal gangs of the city, but he was not satisfied by this victory. He demanded more. He asked the leaders of the Muslim and the Hindu communities to promise that they would maintain peace amongst them. And the 'miracle' happened. Calcutta and its adjoining areas had never had any communal riots. Gandhiji had resolved the conflict, permanently.



This historical incident shows that it is possible to create peace between communities. Opinion leaders have a great role to play. For that reason, the creation of a Neo-Dalit movement can't only begin with an approximation of the elites. We should organise intensive and repeated meetings with all the communities' representatives to make them work together, symbiotically. All the actors need to be awakened to better each other's plight. In this way, they would probably learn that they protect different communities. Also, though the problems seem different but they all suffer because of the culture of impunity and Neo-Liberal alienation. Despite differing perceptions of suffering, their enemy is much the same.

At the grassroots, we must break the wall of silence and enhance the self-esteem of the lower castes to give them back their dignity. We need to make them actors of their own change. Moreover, we should work to bring the communities together by creating some 'shared public space' for Shudras and Dalits, for Hindus and Muslims. This last point is important. Most of the socialisation processes seem to happen on the streets – where various communities and castes are together but remain speared in different district or sidewalks – and place of worship – where ati-Shudras are merely tolerated, not accepted, by the others castes.

In the final analysis, we wish to emphasise three ways that the Neo-Dalit movement must take to improve their political, economic and social conditions. . First, we may fight against political repression and impunity by legal process. Many human rights

organisations are already fighting the system to transform the Brahmanical 'rule of the lord' by coercing them respect the imperfect 'rule of the law'. Secondly, the social impunity should be defeated by changing cognitive weakness. It made some people victim of their inferiority complex and other tormentors due to their superiority complex. We need to create commons forums for Neo-Dalit, in order to break the wall of silence, which leads to the acceptance of this situation. We need to launch a speech (read dialogue) process, which will teach them that they are equal and that they share common interest. PVCHR is developing nearly two hundred model villages based on concept of Neo-Dalit movement.

The Neo-Dalit movement is a sign of hope, honour and human dignity for the most marginalised people facing discrimination based on race, caste, religion and gender. The Nelson Mandela model is the path for PVCHR's Neo- Dalit movement to bring unity of different communities against the caste system, feudalism, communal-Fascism and Neo-Liberalism, through reconciliation for justice and human dignity against the culture of impunity based on silence. It promises to contribute, in posterity, to the pluralistic democracy in the world.

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[1] The word *ati* means extreme. But, in this context, it means the people living in the margins of the marginalised. These people live in extreme deprivation. ~ **Editor**.