

Removing the stigma associated with caste identities can mitigate violence

In two separate incidents in Gujarat last week, two Dalit men were beaten up by Rajputs for [sporting moustaches](#). Earlier in September, a Dalit man in Punjab was [tied to a tree and thrashed](#) by his landlord allegedly for stealing a fan from a fodder shed. In early September in Karnataka, an upper caste person [poured endosulfan into a well](#) to prevent Dalits from using water. On Independence Day, a Dalit man and his mother [were beaten up in Gujarat by an upper caste mob](#) for skinning a dead cow.

These are just some of the many incidents of violence against Dalits that have been recorded in the recent past. In a country that hopes to be a superpower, it is shameful that caste violence is still something that is commonplace. As the election season approaches, the number of politicians who will make a beeline to Dalit homes to eat, show camaraderie, create photo opportunities, and seek votes is likely to go up; but such tokenism has never been able to achieve anything in terms of real changes in the horrifying situation on the ground. The problem is not limited to certain parts of the country or specific economic strata.

Caste violence and discrimination is a ubiquitous problem in society. In spite of the existence of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, its implementation leaves much to be desired. The number of people convicted under the Act remains too small to make a large difference to matters. In March 2017, in answer to an RTI query in Tamil Nadu, it was revealed that over 94% of cases registered under the Act resulted in acquittals.

The problem of caste discrimination is not one of law and order. It is a deep rooted social problem. Discrimination against Dalits is an insidious problem across economic strata. The solution to the problem must come as much from social change and affirmative action, as from legal recourse. The SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act must be used far more stringently and at the same time affirmative action programmes that aim to empower members of Dalit communities must be implemented.

Until the social stigma attached with caste is not removed, the problem of violence will not be solved.

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