

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Discrimination and Marginalization of Scheduled Castes: A Field Study in Gujarat

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Abstract:

The foundation of caste system is on social stratification. Social structure of the ancient Indian society had sustained on the four pillars of Hindu society in a hierarchical ladder. The strategies are always thought, recommended and utilized to sustain the existing system. The means to sustain the system may or may not be based on justice. Mostly the means to sustain any system is adopted on the grounds of perceived justice, though if lacks in fairness, it might be unjust which may lead to varied forms of injustices. The marginalized social groups and communities are at the receiving end. The caste system divides, discriminates, and marginalizes the weaker sections of the society. The physically visible system of Casteism has been weakened. The idea of social stratification based on discrimination, in the present times, is found hidden inside the skins of caste system. The idea remains the same, however, in new forms. The present paper tries to see the sustenance of the caste system and subsequent impact of discrimination, marginalization from the mainstream and violation of natural human rights. The data is primarily based on participant observation and analysis of condition of scheduled castes or dalit community.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Marginalization, Scheduled Castes, participant observation*

1. Introduction

The districts of Bhavnagar and Rajkot of Gujarat State are mostly controlled as well as dominated by Hindu Patel Caste. These districts are blessed with costly crops and fruits. The other characteristics are the establishment of diamond, salt making factories, kite-making, precious stone finishing factories etc. The crops harvesting are the other attributes of the land which attracts a lot of labour force from outside. The chain of command remains in the hands of upper castes especially Patels. The participant observation reveals that water is easily available to these areas. Small dams are constructed by non-dalits. This is for maximum utilization of water for a few as well as to have another form of control over underprivileged people by releasing water at their own will. Land issue is grave here. The upper castes do not let dalit social group to possess land. The situation is so grave that even it seems that they are born to work on other's fields rather to have. The Gram Sabha land in villages could be captured by non-dalits and not by dalits. Therefore, sheer injustice prevails. Dalit Sarpanch bows him to the privileged caste and thus temporarily benefited. The members of dalit caste are either getting equal rights or not do not matter for him. The privileged, therefore, enjoys control on others. In Botad of Bhavnagar city mostly dalits are engaged in diamond factory at finishing work, labour work on cotton fields but they cannot have their own land possession. In other words, the privileged class discriminatory approach demonstrates that dalits be remain at the margins. The strategy is to maintain control over means of economy. Thus, they enjoy domineering position in the society. The cheap availability of labour is another advantage of such domination. Injustice seems having no ending until people from all caste, class will be ready to come at honest platform. This research paper highlights the atrocity cases against the dalits by the non-dalits and the policy of dalits in filing the atrocity cases against the dalits and non-dalits. The paper focuses over the aspects of discrimination and marginalization of dalits in three districts especially on Bhavnagar, Rajkot and Kheda of Gujarat State.

2. Methodology

The methodology used to collect data was the oral information through the participant observation. The learning by living with the community was the means to collect primary data by using semi-structured conversation. The purpose was to interact old and young ages with informative narratives about the village and the gravity of the discriminatory practices faced by the dalits in the present times. The methodology of focused group discussion (FDG) was the important method of participation. The author participated in conferences on atrocities against dalits besides visiting police stations, victim's house and interaction with the grieved family, Panchayat members. This method resulted in the collection of first hand information. The author also recorded their facial expressions and body language.

3. District Kheda

The district Kheda is a district adjacent to the district of Ahmedabad. The district consists of Talukas like Mehmudabad, Matar, Kheda, Nadiad and Thasra. The variety of crops, fruits is benefited due to the presence of rivers. The following are the rivers and crops of Kheda district:

S.No.	NAMES OF THE RIVER	VARIETY OF CROPS
1.	Shedhi	Tobacco
2.	Mahi	Corn
3.	Mohar	Rice
4.	Rinchhol	Wheat
5.		Sugarcane
6.		Rice

Table: 1

(Source: Primary Data collected through FGD)

In economic terms, the areas of Kheda district particularly Nadiad and Anand district (earlier Anand was the part of Kheda district) are known as Charottar area. These areas are more prosperous. The prosperous lands are not in the hands of lower castes people. The prosperity believed to be in the possession of dominant upper caste. Patels are powerful in the Charottar areas. Kheda city is (earlier headquarters of the district) bearing population of Muslims in considerable proportion besides, Patels, Darbar and dalits. Nadiad taluka bears the population of Patels (in greater number) than Darbar, Muslims and dalits. Golden Quadrilateral and Express Highway cross through Nadiad and Anand. Nadiad, being situated on a strategic point, was intelligently transformed in to district headquarter of Kheda. Thus, all institutions such as judiciary, police and other administrative ones were made a part of Nadiad. Meaning by both the important parts of Kheda and Anand district famous as Charottar area (where whole year crops of different kinds grow) are now under the dominant influence of Patels.

3.1. Attributes of Patel Caste

Patels in Gujarat holds

- Lands where it is fertile
- Keeps high quality milch animals for dairy farming. Rears milch animals (mostly Jarsi cows) where dairies are available. Thus, receive Government loans to build Gaushalas
- Establishes educational institutions where it matters
- Construction or renovation of grand old temples which are famous or made famous
- Holds political and administrative posts and run businesses where the demand is more
- Make available the canals (Narmada) and made dams to have control over water, therefore, keeps control over human beings.

The dalit houses have universality in its structure. The universality means the dalit housing construction in almost whole Gujarat is narrow in its nature build on same pattern within a specified area of land. The reason behind is that the upper castes didn't let their lands slipped from their hands due to passage of the Ceiling Act. In order to save their land possession they allotted it in the names of their siblings and kids. As a result, they didn't left any column for dalits and other poor to claim for lands right. In the societal context, Patel caste rarely oppose the entry of dalits in to the temples here but uses other tactics such as fixed the time for its opening and closing. At the time of opening of temple door, a row of Patel caste people could be first to enter. Thus, most of the time dalits do not go there to face invisible though felt discrimination. Patel being dominant in all fields of economy, society and polity pay only small wages to the laborers. They give their lands to the poor for farming on the 1/6, 1/8 basis. Meaning by only one portion of the total crop harvesting remains at the scheduled castes and remaining benefit goes to the owner. The labour wages have to be paid by the dalits. The dalits owns land of Patels on the temporary basis and on prescribed nature. In case of demand for minimum wages by the conscious dalits, no one suffers from the upper caste rather the dalit who cultivates the land on temporary basis are the sufferer. As a result, the fixed pattern of daily wage of meager Rs. 30-40 is in practice. In this way, both the temporary owner of the land and poor people working on those lands are the sufferers and continuously has to bear the pain of marginalization and discrimination. Thus, the situation prevails in which if, in case, scheduled castes labourers raise the issue of wages fixed by the Government the fight remains among the dalits. The conflict will not reach to the actual owner. The issue of high wages, therefore, does not occur in these situations. The situation looks peaceful. Pain get contains only in marginalized voices. Patel maintains their power and position in this way by keeping the scheduled caste at the margins. Thus, these are the reasons behind the weakening of dalit struggle at various parts of Gujarat. The uniformity of struggle is missing in all parts of Gujarat. The Aushotosh Varshney in his view is uprightly correct who opinionated 'Gujarat, part of neither the South nor the North, has one of India's fastest-growing states for over two decades. But unlike the South, Gujarat has not had any significant or long-lasting lower caste movements' (Varshney, 2013:206).

4. District Bhavnagar

Bhavnagar is situated 198 km from the state capital Gandhinagar and to the west of the Gulf of Khambhat. Bhavnagar is always an important city for trade with many large and small scale industries. Alang world's largest ship breaking yard is located just 30 kms away. During the late 19th century, the Bhavnagar State Railway was constructed. This made Bhavnagar the first state that

was able to construct its railway system without any aid from the central government, which was mentioned in the Imperial Gazetteer. In 1948, Bhavnagar was the first state to join the Indian Union. The erstwhile royal family of Bhavnagar continues to lead an active role in the public eye as well as in business (hotels, real-estate, agriculture & ship-breaking) and is held in high regard by the population both in the city as well as areas that comprised the former princely state of Bhavnagar. Industrial development in Bhavnagar district could be attributed to the presence of a large number of diamond cutting and polishing units, salt and marine chemicals, plastics, ship building, and ship-breaking industries. Bhavnagar is an important centre for the diamond cutting and polishing industry in Gujarat as well as India. Thousands of skilled diamond-polishing workers are employed in diamond-cutting and polishing firms, whose subsidiary offices are involved in cities like Surat, Mumbai, and Antwerp. Bhavnagar stands second in the diamond cutting & polishing industry after Surat in India, with 6,000 units operating from the district and employing more than 300,000 people. Bhavnagar's commercial importance is enhanced by its proximity with the Gulf of Cambay and the Arabian Sea. Here are 112 medium and large scale industries located in Bhavnagar district. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhavnagar>). Bhavnagar district is rich in the following sorts of variety of crops and fruits.

S.No.	VARIETY OF CROPS	VARIETY OF FRUITS
1.	Zeera	Papaya
2.	Cotton	Coconut
3.	Wheat	Jamphal
4.	Sugarcane	Sitaphal
5.	Groundnut	Cheeku
6.	Corn	Badam (Almond)
7.	Gram	

Table: 3

(Source: Primary Data)

The district attracts workers because of

S.N	ITEMS	LABOUR CHARGES	HEALTH HAZARDS
1.	Gujarat Switch	Rs. 35-40/- per day	
2.	Aqeeq (stone items)	Rs. 50-60/- per day	Health problem i.e. TB, weak eye sight etc.
3.	Kites	Rs. 100-120/- on one thousand kites with specific work (6-7 months work opportunity in a year)	
4.	Cloths	Rs. 40-50/- (Lab our work on meter basis)	
5.	Diamond	Rs. 150-200/- (10 months job in a year), Rs.250-300 in 10-12 hours, Rs. 100-150 (in just 4-6 hours)	Respiratory and other related diseases.
6.	Crops (Zeera, Cotton, Wheat)	Rs. 80 (in season), Rs.50 (without season)	
7.	Salt-making	Rs. 80/- (Per day earning)	

Table: 2

(Source: Primary Data Collected at Bhavnagar)

The male counterparts are women. Women particularly from Scheduled Caste do have less job opportunities at city areas. Mostly are engaged in brick-breaking and brick-carrying works at building construction sites. The physical exploitation and exploitation based on wage was noticed. It was observed that dalits at village level are happier in few aspects of life than the cities where they live in small houses and compelled to get engaged in hazardous factory works for more hours a day. These things are not naturally happening. These are planned structure based on caste system and poor economic condition of dalits. Such a structure has been created, developed and desired to be maintained with changing times in new economic set ups. The upper castes know that the propagation of caste system will certainly attracts criticism. The critics, however, particularly from 'upper caste' do like to enjoy the fruits of caste system. Therefore, it is important to give the practice of Casteism a new name and, thus, keeps the practice going-on. Whenever such a system is being opposed, a demand for equal rights and equal pay for equal work is made by the dalits. The atrocities, discrimination and marginalization are much practiced in the following forms to curtail the united demands of equal rights in society, economy and polity.

This is also the fact that the lower castes are raising their voices with the help and generation of awareness and related confidence among the dalits through Non-Governmental organizations. Such a confidence challenges the ego of the dominant castes and the ego of the male counterparts from both the dalits and the non dalit communities. As a result, atrocities are usually committed from outside and inside as well. Some observed facts about atrocity cases are under lined below.

4.1. Case Study I

In a case of dalit atrocity, the husband was not ready to take care of his ailing wife and children. She along with her four children resides at her brother's house. The atrocity case was related with the dalit caste people; hence, firstly compromise or the solution was sought. Later on, the case was filed under section 498 which talks about the mental and physical harassment. The court

finally, under Section 125, ordered to look after the upbringing of children by providing fixed amount of money-Rs.800/- per month.

4.2. Case Study II

A rape case was registered against the non-dalit belonging to Koli Patel who had eloped with an adolescent dalit girl. The FIR was filed against the accused. The Sections like 363, 366 were also included which talks about abduction and support provided by others in the case. The section 376 talks about the charges of rape. The accused was put behind the bar. The dalits were not ready to make compromise. On the other side, a case of elopement of an adolescent dalit girl by a married dalit adult man reported was considered a matter of inside. In this case compromise was sought between the two because of both male and female belongs to the dalit caste. It is the policy of dalit struggle. They do have their policy of compromise only in case of conflict among the dalits, not with other caste or community. Meaning by the dalits do not ready to compromise, at any cost in case of atrocity committed against the dalit community by a non-dalit.

The major problem of Bhavnagar and Rajkot districts is the atrocity cases against women. Atrocity cases have been noticed both in privileged and non-privileged families. But privileged class generally succeeds in hiding such atrocity cases against women whether related to dowry or any other issue. There are, however, many more cases related to dowry death, divorce, domestic violence etc. Though efforts are being taken to minimize it but people's cooperation is required on larger level. The male members from dalit caste do earn a handsome wages by working in the factories and females earn from the fields especially cotton crops, therefore, their attitude towards co-operating the organization seems to be indifferent. The problem with them is that they are unable to realize long term benefit by developing themselves more self-reliant through learning skills than receiving money by working on temporary and hazardous basis. The atrocity cases get highlighted at the state level and a fight between dalit and non-dalits came in to limelight. It has become the issue of dignity for the dalits and the issue of weakening of upper caste hegemony. The domination will either be of dalits or non-dalits still poses a question because political pressure is made even upon the judges to delay or give punishment to lesser number of accused out of total number of person involved. The atrocity cases are still in the court of Law since 2006. It seems that the issue of registered atrocity cases has become a challenge for the upper caste of entire Gujarat. The minds of non-dalits engaged in thinking that any such legal battles in favour of dalits may lead to weakening of command and domination over 7% of dalits all over the state. Apart from that such incidents of legal battles by very low strata of the created caste structure people will not be available as cheap labour to provide fuel to the growing industrialization in the state controlled by the same 'upper caste'. They still maintain their thinking of landlordism and system of injustice based on discrimination going on in the garb of democracy.

5. Conclusion

The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are working to minimize the gap between the rich and the poor. The fight against the discrimination and marginalization is persistent since long and seems to be in existence in generations to come. It is because a few upper strata of the community has touched a considerable height and try to transform major institutions either in to privatized or same hierarchical order of economical and societal form for maximum profit and dominance in society. Thus, again maintain the same thinking of 'high and low' but in a new and catchy invisible way. Hence, it is clear to the researcher that injustice may always remain sometimes at village; state, national and at international level. Only the names keep changing i.e., downtrodden people, underprivileged, underdeveloped, backwards, third world countries. Thus, people from these areas will always found working at the lower strata but unacknowledged. Therefore, the need of NGOs will always be there to pacify the wounds, plights of poor through generating varied kinds of awareness to the people. It, therefore, doesn't mean that if a section of society receives justice and comes out from the plight of injustice, the other corners of the world will also be at peace. The injustice, discrimination, and marginalization seem to be remaining or everlasting element until a just system is going to be practiced.

6. Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the field support forwarded by the Non-Governmental Organization called Navsarjan Trust and Action Aid India. He is really indebted to the ICSSR for doctoral fellowship. In the absence of financial support in the form of fellowship, author may be unable to produce such an academic research study.

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