

UNHEARD VOICES®

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Changing Face of Indian Movie



Changing face of Indian cinema

India is undergoing a major psychological transformation for the past few decades. The changes are visible physically. But the physical change is a reflection of psychological transformation. Nation becomes prosperous, strong and healthy when it continues to change itself with the demands of changing times. India has stood this test for generations as signs of enrichment are seen in all the walks of life. The changes are yet to reach expected height but their significance cannot be underestimated.

One of the major elements which shaped the Indian psyche in the post-independence era is movies. People, irrespective of their language, region, sex, age, education, job/profession and social status, have great passion for movies. Obviously, movies have left a deep impact on the Indian psyche. Unfortunately, Indian movies were largely dominated by fantastic and romantic ideas for a very long period. Many critics believe that the Indian psyche would have been different, had they realized the importance of ground reality. For example, excepting few, very few movies, depict the pains, sorrow and hardships of the deprived communities. The movies were largely restricted to upper caste communities and rich people, neglecting backward communities.

This phenomenon was largely seen in Hindi movies while vernacular movies were trying to explore some different paths. Some critics may point out that experimental or parallel movies began a long time back, enriching Indian movies. However, the major handicap of these movies was they were not well received by the people in large, particularly by the deprived communities. Why did this happen? The answer is very simple – lives of

deprived communities were shown on the periphery and were never at the central point. More importantly, people from so-called upper castes, were speaking on behalf of deprived communities.

However, major changes are seen in the past few years in movies, which depict deprived communities. The most notable change is that deprived communities are not merely shown as victims but they have now come to the central stage. Southern films are at the forefront in this connection while some encouraging experiences are also seen in vernacular movies. This new trend has changed all the established yardsticks of a movie in all the aspects of the movie. Another significant aspect is the depiction of women in these movies. Women from deprived communities always face double trouble – they face discrimination on the basis of gender and on the ground of caste. The new movie has crossed these barriers. In many movies, including OTT platforms, women from deprived communities have placed themselves at the central stage.

The other noteworthy angle needs to be considered. All these movies have been successful at the box office. Many may feel that the new movies are provocative and take extreme sides but the fact is otherwise. Any movie cannot be successful on the box office unless it is accepted by people belonging to all castes. Support by a few communities can never achieve box office success, which new cinema is gaining without doubts. Also, one should appreciate that artists and makers of these films are venting out their sentiments through a new medium. We should remember the reality that a similar trend was seen in 'Dalit Sahitya' four decades back.

The new cinema has to be seen as a positive

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change as it involves many social angles. New cinema represents strong signs of new awakening among the deprived communities. This new awakening represents values like human dignity, equality and justice. Getting popular support for new cinema also needs to be seen as a major change in the Indian psyche as it stands as a sign of empathy from non-deprived communities to the pains of their fellows from deprived communities.

Understanding and supporting each other is certainly a sign of the beginning of a healthy society. For a long time, Indian movies were controlled by vested interests. Indian movies were influenced by nepotism, strong prejudices and unrealistic ideas, which actually took the country in the wrong direction, Against this backdrop, new cinema needs to be welcomed as it implies signs of inclusivity and social cohesion.



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Appeal for financial assistance



Social Studies Foundation (SSF) is working with the prime objective of conducting social studies and research of the society in a multi-disciplinary fashion. SSF focus, however, is on those people, who have been facing discrimination and are deprived of benefits of the development and democratic process. SSF logo, thus says, "Knowledge for Empowerment".

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Indian movie : Reflecting social transformation

The Indian cinema shall promote the culture and talent of diverse social groups that are often marginalized in mainstream discourse on cinema, art and festivity. The new Dalit genre in cinema has the capacity to connect with the stories and struggles of underprivileged people across the globe, with a vision that cinema has a crucial role to educate and inspire people for making the world a better place.

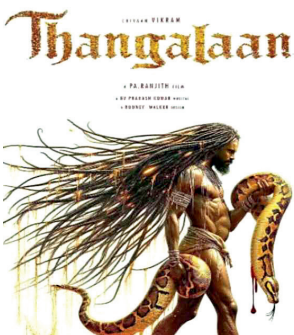
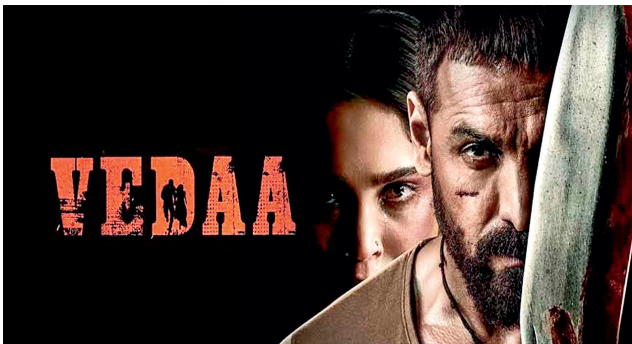
Dr. Harish

Cinema mirrors our social realities, capturing struggles, hardships, and inequalities, while also offering stories of hope and resilience. Over the past decade, India's Oscar submissions have increasingly highlighted critical social issues, reflecting the country's evolving cinematic landscape. Films like *Court* (2015), *Newton* (2017), and *Gully Boy* (2019) have brought attention to the struggles of marginalized communities, while entries like *Jallikattu* (2020) and *Last Film Show* (2022) showcase the diverse and vibrant rural landscape of India.

Along similar lines, the selection of *Laapataa Ladies* as India's official entry for the 2024 Academy Awards is both timely and cause for celebration. This film, with its quasi-feminist perspective, sheds light on the complex cultural and social burdens faced by rural women in India. It offers a poignant narrative that challenges the status quo while urging us to re-examine the way our cinema represents the marginalized. Yet, despite the intellectual and artistic merit of such films, they are often side-lined in India's mainstream film festivals and awards.

In recent times further, the Dalit cinema genre tried to bring some reforms in the conventional routine of popular Indian cinema. The recently released three mainstream films *Thangalaan*, *Vaazhai* (Tamil) and *Veda* (Hindi) break away from the conventional trends of populist flicks, as they revolve around the concerns and dreams of the socially marginalized groups. It introduces Dalit characters as leading protagonists, advancing a nascent but impressive journey of Dalit cinema, registering a claim for a greater democratization of Indian film industry.

The impetus for this change came from the regional film industry, especially the Marathi and Tamil cinema, that offered exceptionally brilliant artwork that not only caters the interests and concerns of





the marginalized social groups but also offers a quality entertainment to the general audience. Nagraj Manjule's *Fandry* (2013), *Sairat* (2016) and *Naal* (2018) set an impressive example of films that are socially sensitive and commercially successful. Later Marathi films like *Uchlya* (2015), *Jayanti* (2021), *Kasturi* (2019), *Zollywood* (2022), etc. kept the momentum on, building a crucial dialogue on cinema's responsibility in offering socially responsible films.

This success was further cultivated creatively by new filmmakers, especially Mari Selvaraj (*Karnan* 2021 and *Periyerum Perumal* 2018) and Vetrimaran (*Asuran* 2019 and *Veduthalai* 2023), substantiating the arrival of 'Dalit Genre' in Indian cinema. By offering nuanced Dalit characters, bestowed with mainstream heroic credentials (like Rajanikant's character in *Kabali*, Dhanush in *Karnan* and Udhayanidhi in *Maamannan*), it breaks the conventional 'victim' stereotypes attached to the representation of Dalit characters on screen.

The Dalit genre narrates the life experiences, struggles and dreams of the vulnerable social groups. This trend is inspired by the fascinating success of Black American cinema in Hollywood and the visible participation of other marginalized and minority groups in the film industry as crucial makers of cinematic art. Such presence celebrates diversity and social harmony and suggests that cinema is not only an enterprise for creating entertainment flicks for commercial profits but it is a moral institution that promotes socially sensitive narratives and celebrates the creativity of the marginalized social groups. However, like the treatment offered to art-house cinema in the mainstream film award shows and festivals, this emerging genre also faces similar disregard and neglect in national cultural events.

Marginalization of Socially Responsible Cinema in India:

Films with profound social messages or artistic depth often struggle to gain recognition at major film festivals or award shows, such as *Filmfare* and *IIFA*. While international platforms like the Oscars or the Golden Globes often celebrate creativity and cinematic excellence, Indian award shows tend to focus more on commercial success. For instance, this year's *IIFA* gave five awards to *Animal*, including Best Film, side lining critically significant films like *Laapataa Ladies*, and *Sirf Ek Banda Kafi Hai*. Such awards primarily serve as platforms for promoting celebrity culture and populist cinema, often ignoring films that represent India's rich social tapestry or challenge societal norms. Consequently, cinematic works that

highlight the lives and struggles of vulnerable social groups, such as Dalits, Adivasis, and rural women, rarely receive the attention they deserve. This trend raises important questions about the socio-political concerns and cultural interests that dominate Bollywood and the Indian film industry at large.

The Indian cinema shall also promote the culture and talent of diverse social groups that are often marginalized in mainstream discourse on cinema, art and festivity. The new Dalit genre in cinema has the capacity to connect with the stories and struggles of underprivileged people across the globe, with a vision that cinema has a crucial role to educate and inspire people for making the world a better place. It is required that public institutions, cinema intellectuals and policy makers shall recognize and celebrate the new rupture that the Dalit cinema has introduced.

The Oscars themselves have faced criticism for their lack of diversity. In 2015, the #OscarsSoWhite campaign criticized the underrepresentation of people of color in major award categories, ultimately leading to a broader conversation about diversity in Hollywood. As a result, the Academy introduced reforms, and today, African American, Asian, and Hispanic artists receive greater recognition.

The outstanding cinematic works of artists and producers belonging to the socially marginalized communities needs an elevating force, so that it can emerge as an inspiration genre for the new generation.

It is also required that film festivals in India, alongside other institutions that promote cinema art, shall connect the producers, artists and technicians for future collaborations. Such association will create an autonomous platform for the artists, creators and cinema lovers to build and celebrate an alternative cultural space, evoking the dignity and diversity of historically vulnerable social groups and other marginalized identities.

Need for inclusivity

Indian cinema has long been criticized for failing to authentically represent marginalized communities, both on screen and behind the scenes. The exclusion of Dalits, Adivasis, and other underrepresented groups from Indian



Vetrimaran



Mari Selvaraj



Pa Ranjit

cinema is a glaring omission, yet the issue has received little attention in public discourse. As a powerful cultural institution, cinema has the potential to educate and inspire, but to do so, it must reflect the diversity of the society it seeks to entertain and engage. Mainstream festivals and awards must take it upon themselves to elevate stories that spotlight the experiences, dreams, and struggles of marginalized communities. There is an urgent need for either the reform of these platforms or the creation of new, socially conscious film festivals that prioritize narratives and talent from diverse social groups, thereby encouraging a more inclusive film industry.

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A Path Forward for Inclusive Indian Cinema

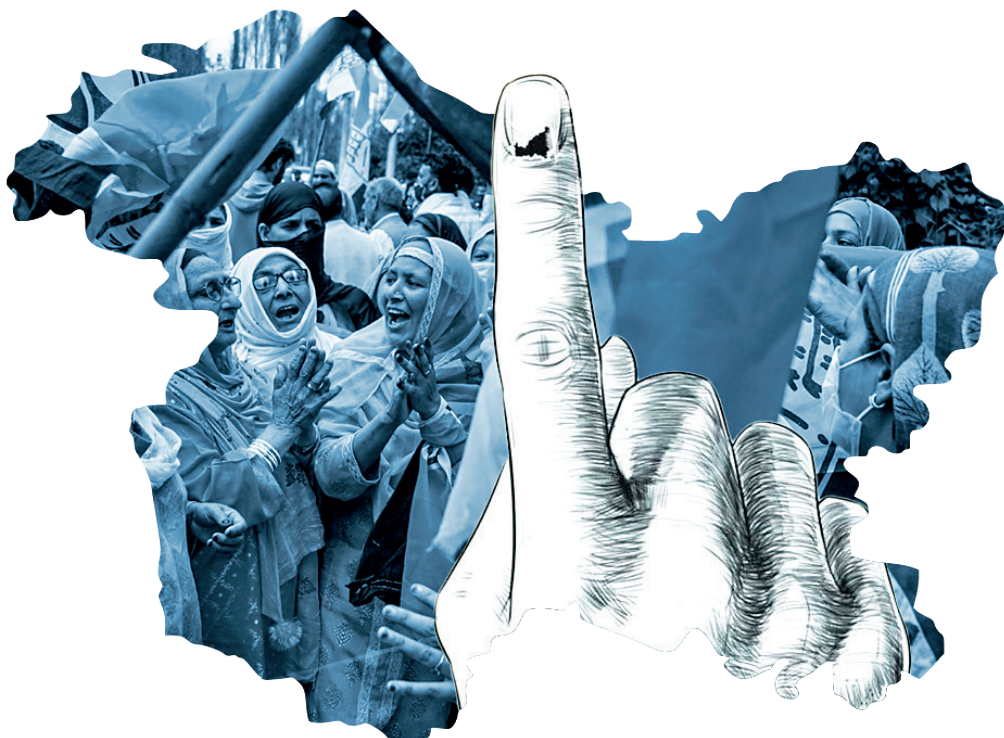
Though there has been some progress—such as the rise of impressive films like *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Masaan* and *Sairat*, which represent Dalit characters and their socio-political voices—these films are still peripheral to mainstream discourse. The success of *Laapataa Ladies* offers an opportunity for Indian cinema to embrace a more inclusive, socially responsible narrative. Recognizing the contributions of artists and filmmakers from marginalized backgrounds is essential to building a more equitable and diverse industry. Indian cinema has the power to educate audiences about the nation's

complex social history. By celebrating films that give voice to historically marginalized communities, we can create a more inclusive cinematic landscape that honors diversity in both storytelling and representation.

The Indian cinema shall also promote the culture and talent of diverse social groups that are often marginalized in mainstream discourse on cinema, art and festivity. The new Dalit genre in cinema has the capacity to connect with the stories and struggles of underprivileged people across the globe, with a vision that cinema has a crucial role to educate and inspire people for making the world a better place. It is required that public institutions, cinema intellectuals and policy makers shall recognize and celebrate the new rupture that the Dalit cinema has introduced. The outstanding cinematic works of artists and producers belonging to the socially marginalized communities needs an elevating force, so that it can emerge as an inspiration genre for the new generation.

It is also required that film festivals in India, alongside other institutions that promote cinema art, shall connect the producers, artists and technicians for future collaborations. Such association will create an autonomous platform for the artists, creators and cinema lovers to build and celebrate an alternative cultural space, evoking the dignity and diversity of historically vulnerable social groups and other marginalized identities. The selection of *Laapataa Ladies* for the Oscars is a positive step toward this goal. It should inspire not just appreciation but also a movement for broader inclusivity within Indian cinema, fostering an environment where artistic expression thrives and the vital stories of the underrepresented are finally heard.

*Author is an Assistant Professor in
Centre for Political Studies school of Social
Sciences JNU Delhi
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Jammu Kashmir election : A journey towards inclusivity

After abrogation of Article 370, marginalized communities got representation in the Assembly for the first time. This did not happen when Article 370 was in force. This reality was never discussed.

Ritika


The Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Legislative Assembly elections are pivotal, occurring for the first time since the abrogation of Article 370 brought substantial changes in August 2019. The constitutional changes brought about by the abrogation of Article 370 took away the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir, which makes the 2024 elections for the Legislative Assembly of a Union Territory (UT) and not a State. Thus, the new Assembly will functionally and constitutionally differ from the previous Assemblies.

The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act of 2019 bifurcated the erstwhile state of J & K into two UTs, the UT of Ladakh and the UT of J & K. While Ladakh remained a UT

without a Legislature and J & K, UT with a legislature similar to the UTs of NCT of Delhi and Puducherry. These elections do not just signify a return to democratic processes and institutions after a decade-long gap, but also the rise of a new electoral landscape, where the first-time youth voters and previously disenfranchised communities exercise their voting rights to write a new development history of J & K. As the region explores its new reality while holding on to its rich history, these elections have implications for the years to come, impacting the broader socio-political dynamics of the UT.

Assembly with limited powers

When the Instrument of Accession was signed in 1947, ceding J & K to the Dominion of



India, J & K acceded to India only in the matters of defence, foreign affairs, and communications. With the addition of Article 370 to the Indian Constitution in 1949, the Centre's legislative powers were limited, and J & K was permitted to draft its constitution; the J & K Constituent Assembly was empowered to choose which provisions of the Indian Constitution would be made applicable to the state. However, the Reorganization Act of 2019 limited the powers of the Legislative Assembly by appointing a Lieutenant Governor (LG) in J & K, in accordance with Article 239 of the Indian Constitution, which deals with the administration of the UTs. The powers of the LG outstrip the powers of the Legislative Assembly. The LG enjoys discretion over legislation, finance and critical government institutions. The LG holds the power to recommend financial bills to the Assembly and Veto legislation and has control over the bureaucracy, police, and anti-corruption bureau of the UT. Recently, the powers of the LG have been further expanded to include the ability to appoint the Advocate General and law officers, have the final say in matters of discretion and influence the prosecution decisions. With the expanding role of the LG, the Legislative Assembly will have limited scope in exercising its powers compared to the previous assemblies.

Changed electoral landscape

The 2024 elections are landmark elections in many ways; apart from the fact that the elections are held after a long halt of ten years in a territory adjusting to its recent identity as a UT, the elections also have seen the most significant addition of the first-time voters in comparison to the previous assembly elections in J & K. As per the data released by the Election Commission of India, there has been almost 23% increase in the size of the electorate. This new electorate includes nearly three lakh youths, who attained voting rights. Also, the members of the Valmiki and Gorkha Communities and the West Pakistan Refugees (WPRs), who were earlier denied voting rights in the State Assembly Elections in J&K. These Communities were previously restricted to voting only in the Lok Sabha Elections.

Major regional parties

Regional parties have played a pivotal role in the politics of J & K. The National Conference (NC) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) kept the issue of the revocation of Article 370 central to their agendas. Both opposed the abrogation of Article 370 and vowed to restore J&K's special status. However, their approaches differed. PDP stayed limited to condemning

the move, whereas NC went ahead with its roadmap to pass a resolution against it and amend the laws. On the question of minorities (Hindus and Sikhs), PDP focused its agenda on rehabilitation and welfare.

In contrast, NC promised a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Kashmiri Pandits and political reservations for the Sikhs. Regarding the immediate plans, NC promised legislative actions and filled vacancies quickly, whereas PDP proposed a loan waiver without a specified timeline. While PDP hesitated to address the reservation debate, NC promised to address the dissatisfaction with the central reservation policy.

National parties

The election manifestos of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress Party presented constraining visions for the future of J & K, resembling the constraining ideologies they stand for. The BJP stayed focused on the issues of national security and further integration of J & K. Their other commitments involved infrastructural development, investments in the tourism sector and employment generation, with a target to generate over a million jobs, along with 24/7 electricity supply and enhanced transportation, reflecting the development centric approach rooted in Nationalism. At the same time, Congress stressed the need to protect the unique identity of the region. It abstained from addressing the abrogation of Article 370 in its manifesto and emphasized the socio-economic issues related to governance, unemployment, and social reforms. With a target of creating 500,000 jobs, the manifesto also highlighted the need for reforms in education and healthcare and better delivery of the central schemes.

On the question of women and marginalized communities

The elections have not only fared well in terms of the political representation of the women but also of the marginalized communities. The size of the female electorate has increased from 33.82 lakhs in 2014 to 43.25 lakhs in 2024. When it comes to marginalized communities, the political participation of West Pakistan Refugees, Valmiki's and Gorkhas was a historic event. In 1947, almost 5,764 families of West Pakistan Refugees settled in various parts of Jammu, especially near the border areas. Over the years, the number of families has increased, taking the total number of WPRs to around two lakhs. Likewise, the Gorkha community has a history of serving in the Dogra Army; their ancestors migrated from Nepal to serve in the army. Despite being residents of J



& K for decades and having war veterans in the family, these families were kept from citizenship rights of the state until 2019. Much similar is the history of the Valmiki's, who were brought to J & K in 1957 by the state government from Punjab for the sanitation work. Since then, these families have resided in Jammu without voting, property, education, and employment rights. These communities have long been kept from fundamental rights due to the state-subject rules of J & K, which make the state-subject certificate a condition for property rights, higher education, government jobs, and legislative assembly elections. The socio-economic conditions of these communities remained backward, with no representation in local politics and high-paying jobs. Following the abrogation of Article 370, the citizenship rules under Section 35 (A) also changed, and citizenship rights were provided to these communities by the UT administration. The 2024 Assembly elections became the first time the people from these marginalized communities, mainly constituting the Dalits, voted for the first time. Making it a historic sight to watch people in their 60s and 70s cast their first votes alongside the first-time young voters in the Legislative Assembly elections.

Story of numbers

The results of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly Elections were declared on October 8 after the last phase of the elections was wrapped up on October 1. There were 90 seats in the UT this time compared to 87 seats in the 2014 elections, out of which four belonged to Ladakh, which is a separate UT now, and 83 belonged to Jammu and Kashmir provinces. With the increase in seats from 83 to 90 under the delimitation commission report 2022, six new seats were added to the Jammu division and 1 seat in the Kashmir division. The increased political participation is not only reflected in the increased number of constituencies but also the voters' turnout this year. In most of the districts of the Jammu Province, the voter turnout was close to 70%, while in many of the districts of Kashmir Province, there was an increase of 14-15% electoral turnout in comparison to the 2014 elections.

The results of the J & K Assembly Elections gave a clear mandate to the J & K National Conference with victory over 42 seats. In contrast, the BJP won 29, the Indian National Congress won six, the PDP emerged victorious in three seats, the J & K People Conference, Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) won one seat each, whereas seven independent candidates have

emerged victorious, a significant increase from the 2014 elections when three such candidates had won. BJP increased its seat share from 25 in 2014 to 29 this time; however, it failed to make a mark in Kashmir and emerge victorious despite the gerrymandering and delimitations. Among many reasons marking BJ's victory in Jammu province, two stand out: first being the demography of the districts of Jammu province being majority Hindus, which aligns with its broader Hindutva ideology, and second, the disenfranchised communities of WPRs, Gorkha's and Valmiki's who were given voting and citizenship rights post revocation of Article 370 in 2019, are located in the areas of Jammu, Samba, and Kathua districts.

Since these communities got their much-needed demands recognized by the BJP, so they constitute a fair share of the party's vote bank in the region. Whereas the Congress Party's hesitation to address the question of Article 370 openly and approach the UT as a strong opposition to the centre impacted its performance in the region. Among the regional parties, NC launched itself with a clear roadmap and promised to restore the special status, which became a marker of its success against its opponent, PDP, which was weak on agendas and lacked clarity in convincing people.

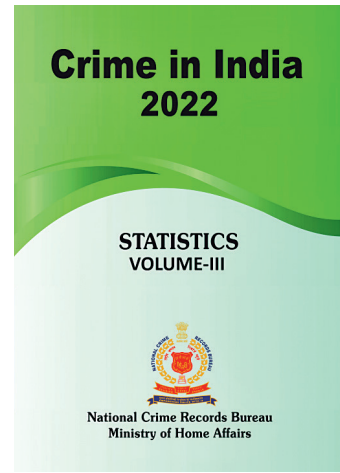
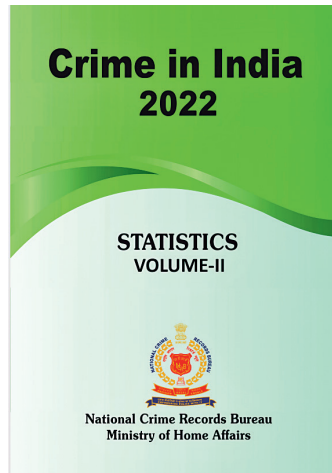
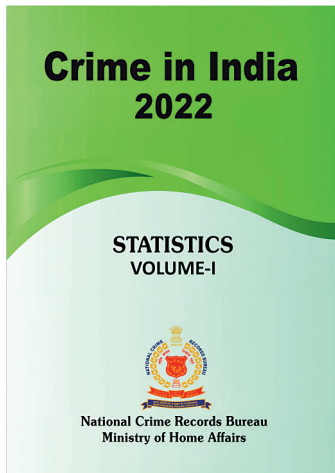
Conclusion

The 2024 J & K Assembly elections mark the beginning of a new era for democracy in the region, with greater inclusivity and increased political participation of the citizens. The participation of the marginalized communities and the increased number of the new electorate paints a hopeful picture of a responsive and responsible political landscape.

With the NC winning a clear mandate in the UT, there is a long road to go for all the parties in the region to foster unity and address the socio-economic challenges confronting the region. With a clear divide in the ideological choices of the Jammu and Kashmir region, crafting an inclusive strategy of governance is the need of the hour.

These elections have been a testimony to the potential for peace, reconciliation, and democracy in the region long identified by the conflict and divide. Having a strong functioning Legislative Assembly will prove helpful for governance in J & K as the UT goes for local body polls at the end of this year.

*Author is a PhD Candidate in Center for African Studies, School of International Studies, JNU
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Crimes against Scheduled Castes: Some concerning observations

In recent years, the issue of crimes against Scheduled Castes (SC) in India has emerged as a pressing concern, reflecting deep-rooted societal inequalities and a troubling rise in violence. Despite progress in various sectors, the data reveals a stark reality: individuals from historically marginalized groups continue to face significant harm, with crimes against them increasing at an alarming rate. This article delves into the trends of such crimes from 2017 to 2022, utilizing data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Through a detailed examination of the types of crimes, the rising prevalence of violent experiences of SC individuals—especially women—are highlighted. By exploring the correlation between state demographics and crime rates, the analysis aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors at play and calls for the urgent need for systemic change to ensure safety and dignity for all citizens, particularly those from SC communities.

Kiran



We all wish to live a life free of harms, especially harms inflicted by others. Yet, a sad reality of our life is that some of us continue to be harmed by others. The crime and subsequent harms are more concerning when the individual harmed is from the group, which has historically been under-privileged. On many occasions, individuals from such groups cannot register the crime with the police or state, thus

eliminating any chance for justice and reduction in such acts in the future.

This article examines the situation of crimes committed against Scheduled Castes in India. The information required for the analysis has been obtained from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) database. The analysis is limited to years 2017-2022, due to ease of access of data and the latest year for which information is available.



Table 1 : Proportion of IPC crimes (%)

Category	Type of IPC crimes (% of total)		IPC offences affecting human body (% of total IPC crimes affecting human body)				
	Offences affecting human body (IPC)	Other offences (IPC)	Simple Hurt	Criminal Intimidation	Rape	Assault on Women	Other offences affecting human body
2017 (IPC total)	32	68	41	8	3	9	39
2017 (SC IPC total)	73	27	48	12	10	11	20
2018 (IPC total)	33	67	43	9	3	9	37
2018 (SC IPC total)	72	28	47	11	11	11	19
2019 (IPC total)	33	67	43	10	3	8	35
2019 (SC IPC total)	69	31	46	11	12	12	18
2020 (IPC total)	25	75	45	11	3	8	33
2020 (SC IPC total)	72	28	50	11	10	10	18
2021 (IPC total)	30	70	45	11	3	8	34
2021 (SC IPC total)	74	26	46	15	11	11	15
2022 (IPC total)	33	67	44	13	3	7	32
2022 (SC IPC total)	72	28	48	14	11	11	15

Source: NCRB data and author's calculation

If we focus only on bodily harms, simple hurt, bodily pain that is resulting from real contact with the frame by an aggravated assault, accounts for the greatest share. The share is similar for SC as well as for total population. But a more disheartening observation is greater percentage of rape, nearly four times, for SC women as compared to women across India. (Table 1). The statistics corroborate the notion which emerges from news, that crimes against SC are more about harming them physically and even more so about harming the SC women in the most condemnable manner.

Table 2 : Crimes against Scheduled castes - Broad picture

Year	Total crimes against SC (IPC+SLL)	Total crimes (IPC + SLL)	Crimes against SC as % of total crimes	Crimes against SC (IPC) as % of crimes (IPC)	Crimes against SC (SLL) as % of SLL crimes
2017	43203	5006978	0.86	1.21	0.31
2018	42793	5074645	0.84	1.22	0.23
2019	46194	5156175	0.9	1.3	0.23
2020	50291	6600070	0.76	1.08	0.18
2021	50900	6096310	0.83	1.25	0.22
2022	57582	5805868	0.99	1.49	0.21



Table 2 shows the broad trends of crimes in India. Crime registered under Indian Penal Code (IPC) and special and Local Laws (SLL). We observe that total crimes in India peaked in 2020, the Covid year, and have then fallen. But even then, 2022 crimes are around 16% more than 2017 total crimes. When it comes to crimes against Scheduled Castes (SC), we see a consistent rise in crimes.

Between 2017 and 2022, crimes against SC have risen by 33%, more than the rise in total crimes. Naturally, the proportion of crimes against SC will form greater proportion of total crimes in 2022 than in 2017. Without any doubt, this is a bad indicator. When we see deeper in the various types of crimes, (Table 2) we see that offences affecting the human body (bodily harms) are more likely to occur for SC than for an average Indian. (We treat percentage as probability.)

Crimes against SC account for about 1.2 to 1.5% of the total IPC crimes. But for certain types of crimes, SC individuals are more likely to be at the receiving end than what this average indicates. In certain types of crimes, the situation is particularly concerning. For murders, attempted murders, assault on modesty of women, insult to modesty of women, and rape, crimes against SC have been consistently rising as a proportion of total crimes of in that category. It is in case of rapes, where crimes against SC account for highest proportion, and that percentage has been consistently rising



from 2017 to 2022. This is a deeply disturbing fact, especially seen together with greater likelihood of rape faced SC women as seen earlier.

It is indeed possible that members of the SC community and particularly women are increasingly registering the cases, which explains some part of rising trends. But it is unlikely to explain all the rise. The rising trend of rape as well as crimes against SC reflects the historical power imbalance as well as the churn which is challenging the power imbalance. The churn, where individuals increasingly assert themselves against injustices, will lead to greater recognition as well as adverse reactions. The crime trend is likely to be reflecting both, though these broad numbers do not provide

definitive evidence on respective share of recognition (registration of crimes) and reaction.

Lastly, we look at the state level situation. We examine the association between proportion of SC in state population and proportion of crimes against SC in total crimes. Here for total crimes, we consider all IPC crimes and atrocity and protection of civil right crimes against SC from SLL crimes.

The pattern which we see consistently is for a set of states, where SC accounts for 10- 20% of the state population, proportion of crime against SC rises. These states are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and in some years, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. The first five states have shown a sad persistence of having a higher share of crimes made up of crimes against SC. There is also an anecdotal case of Punjab, which shows a low percentage of crimes against SC despite being the largest case of SC share of population. This group of states is not a surprise. It has been named and shamed before. Their association with a greater share of state crimes made up of crimes against SC needs to be addressed. Deeper analysis of these state level patterns is a pre-requisite to address the issue.

At the cost of sounding apologetic and repetitive, it must be said that this dark association highly likely reflects an underlying churn. Scheduled castes in these states, accounting for a considerable share of population, are asserting themselves, maybe less radically than expected. The assertion gets them closer to law and forces law to hear them, which means cases will be registered. The assertion also means that regressive forces, which are not yet awake to the unifying notion of fraternity, will react. The assertion must be nurtured, and harm must be nipped in the bud. There is no space for crimes against our own in Bharat 2047.

*Author is an Assistant Professor at Centre for Excellence in Entrepreneurship and Development, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Dr. Ambedkar and Pali language: A path towards enlightenment

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a key architect of the Indian Constitution, embraced Buddhism as a means of achieving social justice, particularly for the Dalit community. His deep engagement with the Pali language, the medium of Buddhist scriptures, was essential to his vision of liberation. This article explores how Dr. Ambedkar's connection to Pali facilitated his mission for equality and empowerment.

Vijendra

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a towering figure in modern Indian history and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, had a deep and enduring connection with the Pali language, largely due to its association with Buddhism. Pali, the language of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures, holds a special place as the medium of the Tipitaka, the canonical texts containing the teachings of the Buddha. For Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism was not merely a spiritual path but a powerful tool for social and moral transformation. The Pali language, in its connection to the purest form of Buddhist teachings, became central to his vision for both individual and collective liberation. His relationship with Pali was deeply intertwined with his larger mission of achieving social justice

and empowering the oppressed, particularly the Dalit community.

We can see Dr. Ambedkar's engagement with the Pali language and its significance in his broader ideological framework through the below points.

1. Pali and Buddhism: A tool for social justice

Dr. Ambedkar's decision to embrace Buddhism was motivated by his deep conviction that it offered a way to attain social justice and personal dignity, particularly for the marginalized and oppressed communities in India, including the Dalits (formerly referred to as untouchables). He saw Buddhism as a rational and ethical system of thought that could dismantle the rigid caste hierarchies and social

inequalities entrenched in Indian society. For Dr. Ambedkar, the core teachings of Buddhism, which were originally written in Pali, held the key to this transformation.

The Pali language became central to Dr. Ambedkar's study and understanding of Buddhist philosophy. As the language of the earliest Buddhist scriptures, Pali provided direct access to the teachings of the Buddha in their most authentic form. Dr. Ambedkar believed that true enlightenment and understanding of Buddhism could only be achieved by studying these original texts. He was concerned that over time, translations of Buddhist texts into other languages might have diluted or distorted the essence of the Buddha's message. Therefore, for Dr. Ambedkar, Pali was not just a linguistic tool but a means to engage with the unadulterated wisdom of Buddhism.

Dr. Ambedkar's embrace of Buddhism was not a private or personal decision; it was a public declaration of his commitment to a just and egalitarian society. He viewed Buddhism as a path to both spiritual liberation and social reform, and Pali, as the language of the original scriptures, played a vital role in this vision. His deep engagement with the Pali texts allowed him to present Buddhism as a philosophy that emphasized equality, compassion, and rationality, in stark contrast to the caste-based oppression of Hindu society.

2. Promotion of Pali: Empowering the Dalit Community

Dr. Ambedkar's advocacy for the Pali language was not limited to his own intellectual pursuits; he actively encouraged his followers, particularly the Dalit community, to study Pali.

He believed that learning Pali would enable people to access Buddhist scriptures in their original form and understand the true meaning of Buddha's teachings. Dr. Ambedkar was of the view that translations of the scriptures, especially into Sanskrit and other languages, often introduced biases that softened or altered the revolutionary messages of Buddhism. By studying Pali, Dalits and other marginalized groups could bypass these distortions and directly engage with the liberating philosophy of the Buddha.

Dr. Ambedkar's promotion of Pali was, therefore, a critical part of his larger effort to empower the Dalit community. He saw Buddhism as a rational and humanistic system of thought that rejected caste hierarchies and emphasized equality for all. By encouraging the study of Pali, Dr. Ambedkar aimed to reconnect his followers with the original teachings of Buddhism and provide them with a philosophical foundation to challenge the oppressive social structures they faced.

In this sense, Dr. Ambedkar's promotion of Pali was more than a linguistic initiative; it was a means of restoring the integrity of Buddhist teachings and equipping marginalized communities with the intellectual tools to resist oppression. The study of Pali became, in Dr. Ambedkar's vision, a way to reclaim the moral and ethical framework of Buddhism, which he saw as a powerful force for social change.

3. Translation of Buddhist texts: Bringing teachings to the masses

In his efforts to revive Buddhism in India, Dr. Ambedkar worked tirelessly to bring Buddhist teachings to a wider audience. He



understood that the power of Buddhism lay in its accessibility and simplicity, and he wanted to ensure that its teachings could be understood by the masses. To this end, he actively promoted the translation of Buddhist scriptures from Pali into languages that could be more easily understood by the Indian public, such as Hindi, Marathi, and English.

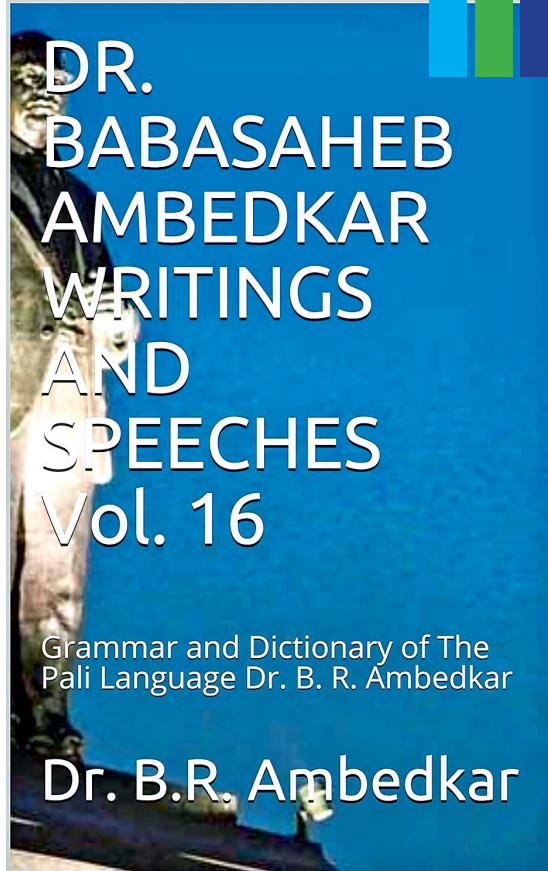
Dr. Ambedkar's emphasis on translating Buddhist texts was part of his broader mission to make the teachings of the Buddha available to all, especially the oppressed and marginalized communities who had long been denied access to spiritual knowledge. He believed that Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion, equality, and rationality, offered a practical solution to the social and moral challenges facing Indian society. By making Buddhist teachings more accessible, Dr. Ambedkar sought to inspire a new generation of followers who could use the Buddha's teachings as a guide for personal and social transformation.

His advocacy for Pali was, in part, an effort to ensure that these translations remained faithful to the original teachings of the Buddha. Dr. Ambedkar was concerned that over the centuries, many interpretations of Buddhism had strayed from the original message, and he wanted to ensure that the core principles of Buddhism—such as the rejection of caste and the emphasis on rational thought—were preserved in any translations. His work in promoting both the study of Pali and the translation of Buddhist texts was thus a crucial part of his efforts to revive Buddhism as a force for social justice.

4. Conversion to Buddhism (1956): The Significance of Pali in Buddhist Rituals

One of the most significant moments in Dr. Ambedkar's life was his public conversion to Buddhism in 1956, when he, along with hundreds of thousands of his followers, embraced the faith as a path to spiritual and social liberation. During this historic event, Dr. Ambedkar underscored the importance of the Pali language by reciting the Trisharan (Three Refuges) and Panchsheel (Five Precepts) in Pali.

This act highlighted the centrality of Pali in Buddhist practice and its role in maintaining the authenticity and purity of the faith's rituals. By using Pali in this highly symbolic ceremony, Dr. Ambedkar demonstrated his commitment to reconnecting with the roots of Buddhism. He saw the use of Pali as a way to preserve the original intent of the Buddha's teachings, and he wanted to ensure that the language of the scriptures remained an integral part of Buddhist practice in India. For Dr. Ambedkar, the public



recitation of the Trisharan and Panchsheel in Pali was not only a personal affirmation of his faith but also a powerful statement of the importance of linguistic and cultural authenticity in spiritual practice.

Conclusion: Pali as a tool for empowerment and liberation

Through his advocacy for the Pali language, Dr. Ambedkar sought to empower the Dalit community by reconnecting them with a spiritual heritage that emphasized equality, compassion, and rationality. Pali, as the language of the original Buddhist scriptures, played a vital role in Dr. Ambedkar's vision for social transformation. By promoting the study of Pali and encouraging the translation of Buddhist texts, Dr. Ambedkar aimed to restore the integrity of the Buddha's teachings and make them accessible to a new generation of followers.

For Dr. Ambedkar, Pali was not just a language; it was a symbol of intellectual and spiritual liberation. Through his work, he sought to use Buddhism and the Pali language as tools for challenging the entrenched inequalities of Indian society and creating a more just and compassionate world. In this way, Dr. Ambedkar's engagement with the Pali language remains a lasting testament to his commitment to social justice and the empowerment of the oppressed.

uv@unheardvoices.co.in



From Yerwada Slum to 'Genius Grant'

Shailaja Paik was born in a village in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, later shifted to a slum in Pune. Her story is motivating. She was recently honoured with 'Genius Grant'. Let us know about the woman, who is committed to human values.

Prajvalant



Shailaja Paik is an Indian-American researcher and professor in history at the University of Cincinnati, and she embodies the potential for individuals from marginalized backgrounds to rise as influential scholars and advocates. Recently, she was awarded the prestigious Genius Grant by the MacArthur Foundation, a fellowship worth \$800,000 (approximately Rs 6.7 crore). This remarkable achievement marks her as the first Dalit woman to receive this honour, highlighting her significant contributions to academia and social justice.

Shailaja's research focuses primarily on Dalit women and the systemic discrimination they face due to their caste. As an associate

professor specializing in women's studies, gender, and Asian studies, she sheds light on the unique struggles of Dalit women, who often contend with the compounded effects of caste and gender discrimination. Her work emphasizes the need for greater representation of marginalized voices in academic discourse and public policy.

Born into a Dalit family in Pohegav, Ahmednagar, Shailaja's early life was filled with challenges. Her family moved to Pune in search of better opportunities, seeking to escape the limitations imposed by their caste. They settled in the Yerwada slum, where Shailaja grew up in a cramped living space with her three sisters.



The family faced numerous hardships, but her parents, Devaram and Sarita, prioritized their daughters; education, demonstrating a strong commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty and discrimination.

Shailaja's parents believed in the transformative power of education and endured various hardships to ensure that their daughters received a quality education. Despite living in a slum lacking basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation, they made sacrifices to support Shailaja's aspirations. The conditions in the slum were harsh; their neighbourhood was often infested with pigs, and the streets were littered with waste. Fetching water was a daily struggle, as they had to stand in long lines at the public tap, often under the blazing sun.

Despite these challenges, Shailaja excelled academically. She completed her Bachelor's degree (BA) from Savitribai Phule University in Pune in 1994, followed by a Master's degree (MA) in 1996. Her educational journey took a significant turn when she moved to the UK in 2007 to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of Warwick. With the help of a fellowship from the university, she further advanced her studies and later transitioned to teaching at a college in the United States. Between 2008 and 2010, she served as a visiting assistant professor of history at Union College, where she continued to develop her academic career.

In 2014, Shailaja published her first book, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination*. This work critically examines the barriers that Dalit women face in accessing education in Maharashtra, highlighting the systemic issues that perpetuate their marginalization. Her research underscores the importance of education as a vital tool for empowerment, arguing that breaking the cycle of discrimination requires addressing the educational inequalities faced by Dalit women.

In 2022, she released her second book, *The Vulgarities of Caste: Dalits, Sexuality, and Humanity in Modern India*. This work explores the intersections of caste and gender, delving into how caste discrimination continues to affect the lives of Dalit women today. It challenges traditional narratives surrounding caste and provides a nuanced understanding of how these social structures impact human rights and dignity.

The MacArthur Foundation recognized Shailaja's outstanding contributions to the field when announcing her fellowship. They noted that her writing addresses the critical issues affecting Dalit women's lives, focusing on the nature of caste discrimination and

the challenges that maintain systems of untouchability. Her scholarship reveals how the history of caste supremacy has been used to deny Dalit women their dignity and identity, often leveraging various forms of inequality to maintain control over their lives.

In addition to her academic pursuits, Shailaja has undertaken projects that bring attention to the lives of female artists in traditional 'Tamasha' performances, a practice that has historically marginalized women from Dalit communities. This project not only highlights the cultural significance of these women but also examines the socio-economic conditions that have led to their exploitation.

Born into a Dalit family in Pohegav, Ahmednagar, Shailaja's early life was filled with challenges. Her family moved to Pune in search of better opportunities. They settled in the Yerwada slum, where Shailaja grew up in a cramped living space with her three sisters. The family faced numerous hardships, but her parents, Devaram and Sarita, prioritized their daughter's education, demonstrating a strong commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty and discrimination.

Shailaja Paik's achievements signify more than just her personal success; they represent a breakthrough for Dalit women in academia and beyond. Her work emphasizes the importance of amplifying marginalized voices and fostering inclusivity within academic discourse and public policy. By breaking barriers and challenging the status quo, she inspires countless individuals, particularly those from similar backgrounds, to pursue their dreams and advocate for social justice.

Through her research, advocacy, and commitment to education, Shailaja Paik is not just a scholar but also a beacon of hope for many. Her story serves as a powerful reminder that the fight for equality and justice is a collective endeavour, requiring solidarity among marginalized communities. As she continues to champion the rights of Dalit women and work towards a more equitable society, Shailaja Paik exemplifies the potential for change that lies within us all.

uv@unheardvoices.co.in



Battle for Dignity

Kerala is often praised for its high literacy rate and progressive politics. The state, which is a stronghold of the Communist Party of India (M) is known for its focus on social justice and equality. Yet, within this context, the story of Chitralekha, a 48-year-old Dalit woman from Kannur, offers a stark reminder of the deep-rooted caste-based discrimination that still exists. Chitralekha, an autorickshaw driver and Dalit rights activist, passed away on October 5 after a two-month battle with pancreatic cancer. Still, her fight for dignity and justice had begun long before.

Chitralekha's struggles began in 2004 when she was forced to give up her nursing degree due to financial difficulties. To make ends meet, she decided to work as an autorickshaw driver at the Edat auto stand near Payyannur in Kannur. This decision, however, set her on a collision course with entrenched social hierarchies. As a woman, and particularly as a Dalit woman, she entered a male-dominated space where most of the drivers belonged to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), affiliated with the CPI-M. What followed was a decades-long campaign of harassment and violence, aimed at driving her away from the autorickshaw stand and denying her the right to earn a livelihood.



The hostility she faced was not just because she was a woman, but because she was a Dalit woman. The other drivers at the stand, many of whom were from the OBC Maniyani caste, couldn't tolerate her presence. They used casteist slurs and misogynistic insults to degrade her. Reflecting on her experience, Chitralekha once said, "When I went to park my auto at the stand, the first response was name-calling—'Oh, Polachi (caste slur), came with the auto?' I was the only Dalit woman at that autorickshaw stand. The Maniyanis couldn't tolerate my presence as a Dalit woman. That's where the history of caste oppression and untouchability against me began." As told by Chitralekha to Maktoob media.

What followed was a series of increasingly violent acts to force her out. In 2004, soon after she started working as a driver, Chitralekha's autorickshaw was set on fire by CITU members. She was warned to stop driving, as her presence was supposedly taking away the livelihood of

one of their own members. This act of violence was intended to send a clear message: a Dalit woman had no place in this profession, especially not among the ranks of CITU's male drivers.

But Chitralekha refused to be intimidated. She lodged a complaint with the police, and although some arrests were made, the harassment continued. Undeterred, she fought back, determined to stand her ground. She soon became a symbol of resistance, not just against gender discrimination but also against the caste-based violence that is often ignored in Kerala's political discourse.

In 2013, her autorickshaw was set on fire again. This time, it sparked protests by Dalit and Bahujan organizations who stood up against the upper-caste dominance within the Communist Party. Despite the growing support from Dalit rights activists, Chitralekha and her husband found themselves in legal trouble. In 2014, they were arrested in connection with a police case and spent 20 days in jail. The accusations were widely believed to be a part of the ongoing campaign to break their resolve.

That same year, Chitralekha staged a 122-day protest in front of the Kannur District Collector's office. She refused to be silent about the ostracism and violence she had faced. Her protests caught the attention of the then Congress Chief Minister of Kerala, Oommen Chandy, who offered her a plot of land and ₹5 lakh to build a house. It seemed like a victory, but in 2016, when the Left Democratic Front came to power, the order was revoked, and the case is still pending in the Kerala High Court.

Chitralekha's battle was not just against caste and gender discrimination but also against the political establishment that claimed to stand for equality and social justice. Ironically, the CPI(M), a party that often positions itself as a defender of Dalit rights, was complicit in her persecution. While they paid lip service to Dalit causes, their trade union actively participated in the violence against her.

Despite the challenges, Chitralekha never gave up. Her strength and resilience became an inspiration for many, and her story caught the attention of filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, who once compared her courage to that of Phoolan Devi, the Bandit Queen. Like Phoolan Devi, Chitralekha refused to be silenced by an oppressive system.

In the end, the struggle took a toll on her health. Diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in August, Chitralekha fought the disease with the same determination she had shown in her fight



for justice. But on October 5, she passed away in a private hospital in Kannur.

Chitralekha's life is a stark reminder that caste and gender discrimination are not relics of the past—they continue to shape the lives of millions in India today. Her story highlights the hypocrisy within Kerala's political landscape, where progressive rhetoric often hides the reality of caste-based oppression. Even in a state that prides itself on being socially advanced, Chitralekha's 20-year battle for her basic rights

reveals the persisting deep-seated inequalities.

Her legacy will continue to inspire those who fight for justice, equality, and dignity. Chitralekha's life is a testament to the strength of the human spirit in the face of overwhelming odds. Though her journey has ended, the fight she led against caste and gender discrimination in Kerala remains far from over.

*Author is Pune based journalist.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Dalits allowed to pray at Chennai temple after 12-years ban

Dalits in Vazhuthalambedu village near Chennai were able to enter and pray at the Bidari Ettiyamman Temple after 12 years, thanks to the intervention of Tiruvallur collector Prabhu Sankar and superintendent of police Srinivasa Perumal. The dominant Vanniyar community has long resisted allowing Scheduled Castes to use the streets leading to the temple. Although the temple reopened after talks between the communities, tension persists, with objections to Dalits using pathways that pass through Vanniyar areas.

The district administration has now transferred 160 meters of land connecting the village to the temple to the HR & CE department, ensuring public access. They have also agreed to lay a new road to the temple and allocated Rs 76 lakh to address other community demands, including separate mantapams and cremation facilities. Meanwhile, police have registered a case against 1,500 people for preventing Dalits from entering the temple.

77 percent of manual scavengers are Dalit, reveals report

A recent report reveals that 77% of manual scavengers in India are from Dalit communities, with 68.9% belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) category, 14.7% to the Other Backward

Class (OBC), and 8.3% to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities. The data, compiled by the Social Justice Ministry under the National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) program, highlights the caste-based nature of the occupation despite efforts to mechanize sanitation work and ensure worker safety. Manual scavenging continues to be a hazardous and often deadly profession, with the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) recording 339 deaths in 2022-23 alone. Despite these concerns, the distinction between manual scavenging and hazardous cleaning practices under existing laws leaves many workers without adequate protection or rehabilitation, contributing to ongoing risks for those involved in this dangerous work.

Supreme Court Secures IIT Seat for Dalit Student After Payment Delay

Supreme Court had directed IIT Dhanbad to admit 18-year-old Dalit student – Atul Kumar - from Muzaffarnagar, in the electrical engineering stream after he missed the admission deadline due to a delay in paying the fee. Overjoyed by the decision, Atul expressed relief, stating, "My life is back on track now". The court ordered that he be admitted to the same batch he was initially selected for, with full benefits, including hostel accommodation.

Atul's father, Rajendra Kumar, shared his struggles in collecting the Rs 17,500 needed for his son's admission. With help from friends and his own savings, Rajendra managed to secure the funds just hours before the deadline. The family, who had already celebrated Atul's success when he cleared the JEE (Advanced) exam, plans to distribute sweets again in their village in honour of this new victory.

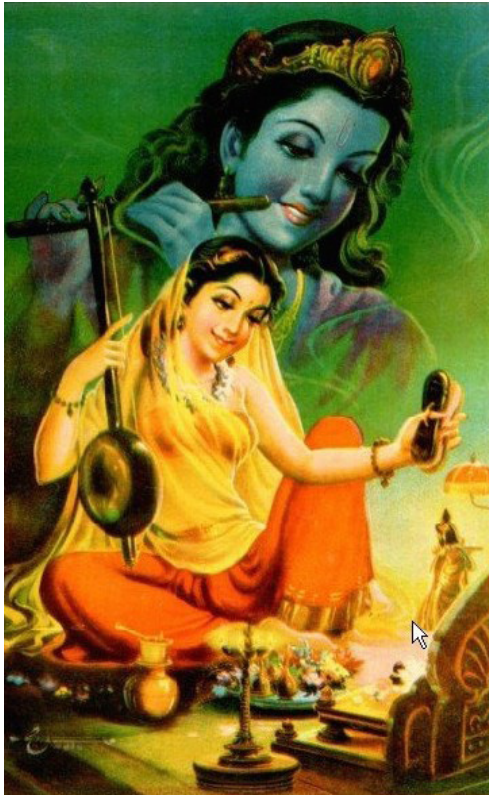
*Compiled by Prajvalant.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*

DIN VISHESH

Remembering Meerabai

17th October

Meerabai Birth Anniversary



Meerabai, a princess, dedicated her life to the worship of Lord Krishna and expressed her devotion through poetry and song. She is known for her passionate bhajans (devotional songs) that reflect her intense love for God. Sant Ravidas was considered a spiritual guide or guru by Meerabai. While historical evidence of their relationship is limited, their teachings and philosophies align closely. Their shared emphasis on love and devotion to God, as well as their rejection of societal norms, has led many followers to celebrate the bond between them, viewing Ravidas as an important influence in Meerabai's spiritual life. Meerabai's bhajans convey messages of love, equality, and devotion. They inspire many to seek a personal connection with the divine, transcending social barriers.

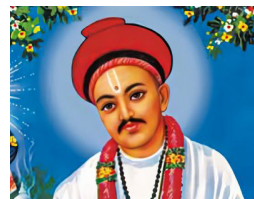
Meerabai is regarded as a symbol of female empowerment in spirituality. Her life and works continue to inspire millions, making her an enduring figure in Indian culture and spirituality. Her devotion and poetic expressions resonate across generations, emphasizing that true love for God knows no boundaries.



17th October
Maharshi Valmiki
Birth Anniversary



12th November
Madan Mohan Malviya
Death Anniversary



12th November
Sant Namdev Maharaj
Birth Anniversary

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