



## Casteism during Corona Crisis: Incidents of Humiliation and Violence faced by Scheduled Castes in India

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is aimed to discuss the problem of casteism faced by Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India during the Corona pandemic. Despite the global effort to fight the pandemic, the so-called upper and dominant castes people continued to target and discriminate against SCs in that period. The incidents of humiliation and violence against SCs increased during the lockdown period. The casteist mindset of people was reflected in their refusal to eat food prepared by SCs in quarantine centers and in their use of the term "social distancing" instead of "physical distancing," which exposed their inherent bias towards SCs. The Corona pandemic provided an opportunity for such casteist mindset people to attack SCs. It concludes by emphasizing that the virus of casteism is far more dangerous than the coronavirus as the latter may disappear, but the former remains deeply entrenched in Indian society.

**KEYWORDS:** Corona, Casteism, Humiliation, Violence, Scheduled castes.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In India, Scheduled Castes (also known as Dalits, Untouchables, and other degrading names) have a long history of victimization through violence, humiliation, discrimination, and exploitation. They have been subjected to various forms of abuse, including murder, rape, sexual assault, verbal abuse, social boycotts, arson attacks, forced migration, and even treated as slaves by the so-called upper and dominant castes. Despite several years of Indian independence and the enactment of strict laws, the incidents of humiliation and violence against Scheduled Castes have not significantly decreased (Mathew and Nayak, 1996; Guru, 2009; Jodhka, 2001).

The caste system in India was established with the concept of 'purity' and 'pollution,' where people from the Scheduled Castes were considered impure by the so-called upper castes. Women from lower castes are often targeted by men from upper

castes in caste conflicts to suppress the rising voice of lower castes (Dumont, 1974; Teltumbde, 2012).

In India, one person belonging to Scheduled Castes faces a crime in every 15 minutes and daily six Scheduled Castes women face incidents of rape. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), every year, the average number of reported cases of humiliation and violence on Scheduled Castes people is more than 40,000, which means that every day, more than 100 cases of serious incidents of humiliation and violence faced by Scheduled Castes such as discrimination, beating, murder, robbing, murder attempt, and rape are registered, but only in 16% of cases, the criminals are found guilty on the basis of the SC/ST Act.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Civil Rights Organization Evidence, only in Tamil Nadu, during one month of the Covid-19 lockdown, 25 cases were registered of crimes faced by SCs, and by 03 May, these crossed the number of 150. Throughout the country, these types of incidents were continuously increasing in India. Based on these incidents, we can imagine how much more dangerous these poisonous casteist mindset people are than the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

Here are some cases of humiliation and violence that Scheduled Castes people faced during the lockdown and Covid-19 pandemic:

- On 14 April 2020 news, a man named Seraj Ahmad refuses to eat the food cooked by Lilawati Devi (a Scheduled Caste woman and also the village head). Because the cook was absent at

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/crime-against-scheduled-caste-scheduled-tribes-saw-a-rise-of-7-and-26-in-2019-ncrb/article32730990.ece/amp/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.newsclick.in/Tamil-Nadu-Caste-Based-Violence-COVID-19-Lockdown?amp>



that time, so she cooked the food for five people who were quarantined in the quarantine centre of Bhujouli Khurd village (district- Kushinagar, state- Uttar Pradesh).<sup>3</sup>

- On 19 May 2020 news, two so-called upper caste boys (from Himachal Pradesh) in quarantine refused to eat the food and drink the water from the hands of a Scheduled Caste woman who worked as a food mother in the school of Bhumka village (district- Nainital, State- Uttarakhand). Pradhan from the village demanded that there should be a case of SC/ST Act against them for such type of things.<sup>4</sup>

- On 25 May 2020 news, 4 migrant labour Brahmins out of 100 migrant laborers were denied to have food cooked by a Schedule caste boy in the Banaso Quarantine centre in Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand state. On their demand Vishnugarh village head Lakshmi Devi arranged dry ration for them.<sup>5</sup>

- On 09 April 2020 news, the police arrested the three accused in Pingore village (district- Palwal, state- Haryana) belonging to the Gujjar community for allegedly barging into the house of a Schedule caste. They attacked violently on that family with armed such as sticks, iron rods and bricks because that family did not switch off the lights at 9 pm on 5 April, as suggested by PM Narendra Modi.<sup>6</sup>

- On 11 April 2020 news, a 20-year-old man Hrishikesh (belonging to Schedule castes) was beaten by Pappu Kashid and three others on the bases of a rumour about covid-19 testing positive in Beed village in Maharashtra state. The victim

suffered head injuries because the accused beat him with sticks.<sup>7</sup>

- On 18 April 2020 news, Dungarram Meghwal belonged to Scheduled caste was murdered by five upper-caste men belonging to Rajput and Devasi castes in Basni village (district- Jodhpur, state- Rajasthan). The conflict was based on a land dispute in the village of Bhat Koriya. But relatives of Dungarram and other people said that it is due to caste mentality and upper-caste dominance.<sup>8</sup>

- On 3 May 2020 news, a young boy (wearing a t-shirt with B.R. Ambedkar's image) was beaten up and humiliated by a policeman for talking to women from a dominant caste in Chengam village of Thiruvannamalai district. The policeman was suspended after a case was filed under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.<sup>9</sup>

- On 03 May 2020 news, in India Scheduled Castes people were affected the most in all aspects. They (SCs) came their villages from cities and became unemployed due to the lockdown; many of them not received their salary for their previous work. In a survey done in Tamil Nadu, it has been found that SC/ST workers had not received their wages, while the dominant caste workers had. Even many of these workers had not received any cash transfers as promised by the government. Of the 20 people surveyed, only 2 had received Rs1300, as wages during the lockdown. 11 of the participant of the survey, does not hold any Jan Dhan Account, and thus most of them did not receive any cash transfers announced by the central and the state government.<sup>10</sup>

- On 12 May 2020 news, some activists said that during the lockdown period in Tamilnadu, the so-called upper caste people take lockdown as an opportunity for violence and humiliation of Scheduled castes people. To that date, four people from scheduled castes have been murdered during

<sup>3</sup><https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/india/coronavirus-indian-man-in-precautionary-quarantine-refused-to-eat-food-prepared-by-a-dalit-booked-by-police1.1586859626981>

<sup>4</sup><https://hindi.news18.com/news/uttarakhand/nainital-quarantined-upper-caste-people-refused-to-eat-food-cooked-by-dalits-uksh-nodgm-3126533.html>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.prabhatkhabar.com/amp/story/state/jharkhand/hazaribagh/denied-to-eat-food-made-by-dalit-jharkhand-hazaribagh-hindi-news-corona-center-covid-19-lockdown-quarantine-prabhat-khabar>

<sup>6</sup><https://scroll.in/latest/958665/covid-19-dalit-family-in-haryana-allegedly-attacked-for-not-following-pms-call-to-turn-off-lights>

<sup>7</sup><https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/coronavirus-one-held-for-beating-up-dalit-man-spreading-virus-rumours-6357207/>

<sup>8</sup><http://twocircles.net/2020apr26/436255.html>

<sup>9</sup><https://thewire.in/caste/tamil-nadu-caste-atrocities-lockdown>

<sup>10</sup><https://www.indiaspend.com/amp/amid-covid-19-scheduled-caste-workers-face-discrimination>



the lockdown and people who face discrimination, violence and humiliation can't go for a proper solution for their problems due to the lockdown. Sanitary workers, scavengers, maids and migrant workers most of them belong to scheduled castes and face many types of discrimination, humiliation and violence due to the upper caste mentality. In Nilakottai, there have been incidents where shops have refused to supply things to scheduled castes, because of the perception that they are not hygienic people. In some villages in Tiruvannamalai district, upper caste people have allegedly even placed thorns outside SCs colonies to ensure they don't move out. The scheduled castes struggled with such types of things along with covid-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

- On 03 June 2020 news, a Scheduled caste Panchayat President was forced to dig a grave by members of so-called upper castes in Tiruvannamalai in Tamilnadu state.<sup>12</sup>
- On 01 June 2020 news, the Punjab and Haryana High Court ruled that making caste-based remarks during a phone call is not an offence under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The bench reasoned that since the remarks were not committed within "the public view", it cannot be assumed that those were meant to humiliate the complainant.<sup>13</sup>
- During the lockdown period, a 21-year-old person belonging to the Scheduled caste was beaten by the so-called upper caste in Uttarakhand state and nine days later he died due to that caste-based violence. His crime was only that he ate the food in the wedding in presence of upper caste people to sit on the chair. The wedding food had been cooked by upper-caste residents because many people in

remote regions don't touch any food prepared by scheduled castes.<sup>14</sup>

- On 30 March 2020 news, a Scheduled caste person was allegedly beaten up by Jats for 'opening his essential items shop and for keeping a picture of Ambedkar. They also socially boycotted that particular family in the village Bhilwara (district- Jaisinghpura, state-Rajasthan) and also announce if anybody will help them they will pay 11,000 as a fine. Initially, FIR was not filed properly and the police release the accused the next day. But after the death threat and becoming video viral Superintendent of Police give the order to file a proper FIR and arrest the Accused.<sup>15</sup>
- On 03 May 2020 news, a Velicham TV reporter in Tamilnadu was assaulted on 23 April 2020 by a group of thirty people. He was assaulted because he makes a report on the vandalising of an Ambedkar portrait before the lockdown. Those thirty people who were connected with that assault have arrested later by police.<sup>16</sup>
- On 22 May 2020 news, an 18-year-old Scheduled Castes boy was beaten and forced to drink urine on 17 May by Backward Caste people in the Mancherial district of Telangana state. The reason was that he loves a young girl from a backward caste and wants to marry in a temple where people found both in the temple and humiliate the boy in many ways. They have used casteist slurs against him. A case under the Prevention of Atrocities against SC and ST Act has been lodged.<sup>17</sup>
- On 18 May 2020 news, a five year old Scheduled caste girl (Bhuiya community) lost her life because of starvation in Hesatu village (district-

<sup>11</sup><https://www.news18.com/news/india/4-dalits-killed-in-4-days-activists-say-upper-castes-in-tamil-nadu-using-lockdown-as-opportunity-for-assaults-2615511.html>

<sup>12</sup><https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamilnadu/panchayat-chief-forced-to-dig-a-grave/article31742988.ece>

<sup>13</sup><https://scroll.in/latest/963467/casteist-remark-made-privately-is-not-an-offence-under-sc-st-act-says-highcourt>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-48265387>

<sup>15</sup><http://twocircles.net/2020apr26/436255.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://thewire.in/caste/tamil-nadu-caste-atrocities-lockdown>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.thelede.in/governance/2020/05/22/in-caste-crime-dalit-boy-beaten-forced-to-drink-urine>



Latehar, state- Jharkhand) in front of her mother. Her family became unemployed in lockdown and get no source of food for 4-5 days. Neither did any community in the village help them and nor did any government relief reach them.<sup>18</sup>

- On 02 June 2020 news, a 17 years Scheduled Caste boy was brutally tortured in Bhadore Police Station (district- Barnala, state- Punjab) to retrieve the LED, which was later recovered from someone else. He was hospitalized from 10-18 May.<sup>19</sup>

## II. METHODS

Content analysis is used as a method to study incidents of violence and humiliation against Scheduled Castes people by the individuals (so called upper and dominant castes) who hold a casteist mindset. Content analysis is a research method that involves analyzing data in a systematic and objective manner. It is often used to analyze qualitative data, such as text, to identify patterns, themes, and categories.

The secondary data was collected from websites that provide information about incidents of violence and humiliation against Scheduled Castes people. The paper focuses specifically on incidents of violence and humiliation against Scheduled Castes people by individuals who hold a rigid casteist mindset in the pandemic period of corona. By studying incidents of violence and humiliation against Scheduled Castes people, the research paper seeks to shed light on the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in society and its impact on marginalized communities. This research is important because it can help to inform policies and interventions aimed at addressing caste-based discrimination and promoting social justice.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are many theories related to humiliation and violence, but this paper focuses on subaltern perspectives because Scheduled Castes are considered subordinate by so-called upper and dominant castes in India. This subordination is a reason for violence and humiliation inflicted upon

them by upper and dominant castes (Shah et al., 2018). This paper also incorporates the conflict or Marxist perspective, as the lower economic conditions of Scheduled Castes are another main reason for their humiliation and violence. The unequal distribution of economic resources creates conflicts between so-called upper and lower castes (Ranganayakamma, 2013). Additionally, this paper includes the structural violence theory, which refers to a pattern of violence where some social institutions become a cause of violence and humiliation inflicted upon Scheduled Castes (Singh, 2011; Yadav, 2011; Kumar, 2012; Pai, 2013).

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this paper, we find that after so many years of India's independence, the stereotypical mindset of so-called upper and dominant caste people has not changed towards Scheduled Castes people. They (upper and dominant castes people) have had prejudices about Scheduled Castes people for many centuries. During the Corona pandemic and lockdown crisis, when everyone was suffering in many ways, the people of Scheduled castes faced humiliation and violence from upper and dominant castes people. The people of Scheduled castes have many more problems than upper and dominant castes people because most of the migrant people belong to Scheduled castes. They suffered during migration, and after reaching their homes, they became mostly unemployed, which further worsened their situation. During the lockdown period, we found news related to humiliation and violence on Scheduled castes people by the people of the upper and dominant caste, such as murder, rape, honour killing, beatings, and discrimination in quarantine centers when upper caste people refused to take food cooked by Scheduled castes.

The humiliation, discrimination, and violence based on castes are a reality that results from many stereotypes and prejudices related to Scheduled Castes people. The people of the upper and dominant castes consciously and subconsciously place Scheduled Castes people at the lower rungs of society. Due to caste-based discrimination, people of Scheduled Castes face problems with income parity and promotional opportunities.

## V. CONCLUSION

Throughout Indian history, people from Scheduled Castes have been victims of caste-based discrimination, violence, and humiliation. The discrimination they face is not just limited to

<sup>18</sup> <https://dalitawaaz.com/jharkhand-5-year-old-dalit-child-dies-of-alleged-starvation-in-latehar/1039>

<sup>19</sup> <https://dalitawaaz.com/punjab-barnala-bhadaur-police-station-tortured-dalit-boy-in-custody/1219>



physical violence, but also includes economic, social, and political exclusion. Stereotypes and prejudices related to impurity, low self-esteem, low courage, and low-income resources further exacerbate their difficulties. These stereotypes are deeply rooted and continue to persist even today. Despite strict laws against such incidents, people from Scheduled Castes still face many types of humiliation and violence on a daily basis due to their low-income resources, political participation, and social status. The Corona pandemic and lockdown crises have also highlighted how deep-rooted these stereotypes are in the minds of people from dominant castes. Religious texts have been a significant factor in creating and perpetuating these stereotypes and prejudices. Certain castes are considered pure while others are deemed impure, leading to discrimination, humiliation, and violence against Scheduled Castes. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, a prominent Indian social reformer, and leader, had emphasized the role of religious texts in perpetuating discrimination against Scheduled Castes. He argued that the main reason for their discrimination, humiliation, and violence was the religious texts of Hinduism. The statement, therefore, accurately portrays the historical and contemporary discrimination faced by Scheduled Castes in India and the root causes of this discrimination.

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