

NOTE

CASTE FEUDS

Bharat Dogra writes :

Amidst the roar and rhetoric of the leadership of communities locked in the on-going caste feuds of Rajasthan, is anyone thinking about the much more urgent and serious problems of the weakest dalit, tribal, backward communities of this state?

A few years ago this Correspondent visited some villages and slums of Rajasthan only to witness the degrading situation Rajasthan's 'silent communities' live in.

25-year-old Chanda lives just near the tourist resort of Jal Mahal in Rajasthan. It would be hard to imagine that just a walk of a few steps from urban grandeur can bring one to a colony of manual scavengers where several women still carry out the traditional occupation of cleaning and carrying human excreta. Chanda has to clean 25 dry (non-flush) toilets in a single day. When her bucket is filled with excreta she has to walk for one km to throw it away at a secluded place. On several days she vomits, on a few days almost every year she has to be given drip treatment.

Another conversation this writer remembers was with the Kalbelia Jogi families in Kavas Panchayat of Barmer district. They were living a highly uncertain existence on land where they had only recently managed to settle. The most disturbing thing which they said was that while they also are classified as scheduled castes, people of another scheduled caste (who are better placed in the socio-economic hierarchy) had initially refused to allow them to take water from their water-source. It was only after a lot of effort that they got the permission to obtain water from there—this was a necessary condition for survival of their new settlement.

The Sahariya tribals of Baran district had attracted national attention when some time back several starvation deaths were reported to have taken place among the Sahariyas.

In Naya Talaab village of Bichiwara block terrified Bhil tribals related in July 2006 how a group of forest department officials swooped on this village like an invading army with axes and guns. They started destroying the crop which these tribals had planted so carefully in their villages. The officials accused the tribals of encroaching forest land. In reality these tribals carefully had protected a lot of trees, and in addition had taken up water conservation work successfully.

Whatever solutions are found and agreements are reached in the present day crisis situation, the interests of the weaker sections should not be ignored. At present they benefit the least from reservations. Their share in all opportunities—economic betterment, education, jobs, political representation—must increase.

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