

Untouchability

Untouchability is the practice of ostracising a group by segregating them from the mainstream by social custom or legal mandate. The excluded group could be one that did not accept the norms of the excluding group and historically included foreigners, nomadic tribes, law-breakers and criminals and those suffering from a contagious disease. It could also be a group that did not accept change of customs enforced by a certain group. This exclusion was a method of punishing law-breakers and also protecting traditional societies against contagion from strangers and the infected. A member of the excluded group is known as **untouchable**.

The term is commonly associated with treatment of the Dalit communities, who are considered "polluting" among the people of South Asia, but the term has been used for other groups as well, such as the Burakumin of Japan, Cagots in Europe, or the Al-Akhdam in Yemen.

Untouchability has been made illegal in post-independence India, and Dalits substantially empowered, and attempts have been continuously made to end the hostilities.^[1]

Contents

Diverse ethnicities population in South Asia

Government action in India

Untouchable groups

See also

References

Diverse ethnicities population in South Asia

According to Sarah Pinto, an anthropologist, untouchability in India applies to people whose work relates to "death, bodies, meat, and bodily fluids".^[2] In the name of untouchability, Dalits have faced work and descent-based discrimination at the hands of the dominant castes. Instances of caste discrimination at different places and times included:^[3]

- Prohibition from eating with other members
- Provision of separate cups in village tea stalls
- Separate seating arrangements and utensils in restaurants
- Segregation in seating and food arrangements in village functions and festivals
- Prohibition from entering into village temples
- Prohibition from wearing sandals or holding umbrellas in front of higher caste members
- Prohibition from entering other caste homes
- Prohibition from using common village path
- Separate burial grounds
- No access to village's common/public properties and resources (wells, ponds, temples, etc.)
- Segregation (separate seating area) of children in schools



Untouchables of Malabar, Kerala (1906)

- Bonded labour
- Social boycotts by other castes for refusing to perform their "duties"

According to Dr B. R. Ambedkar, untouchability was born about 400 AD, due to the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahmanism (an ancient term for Brahmanical Hinduism).^[4]

Government action in India

During the time of Indian independence, Dalit activists began calling for separate electorates for untouchables in India to allow for fair representation. Officially labeled the Minorities Act, it would guarantee representation for Sikhs, Muslims, Christian, and Untouchables in the newly formed Indian government. The Act was supported by British representatives such as Ramsay MacDonald. A separation within Hindu society was opposed by national leaders at the time such as Mahatma Gandhi, although he took no exception with the demands of the other minorities. He began a hunger strike to protest this type of affirmative action, citing that it would create an unhealthy divide within the religion. At the Round Table Conferences (India) he provided this explanation for his reasoning:

I don't mind untouchables if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political rights of the untouchables don't know their India, don't know how Indian society is today constituted and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing that I would resist it with my life.^[5]

Mahatma Gandhi achieved some success through his hunger strike. Dalit activists faced pressure from the Hindu population at large to end his protest at the risk of his ailing health. The two sides eventually came to a compromise where the number of guaranteed seats for Untouchables would be reduced, but not totally eliminated.

The 1950 national constitution of India legally abolished the practice of untouchability and provided measures for positive discrimination in both educational institutions and public services for Dalits and other social groups who lie within the caste system. These are supplemented by official bodies such as the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Despite this, instances of prejudice against Dalits still occur in some rural areas, as evidenced by events such as the Kherlanji massacre.

Untouchable groups

- Scheduled Caste in South Asia
- Cagots in France and Spain^[6]
- Burakumin in Japan
- Baekjeong in Korea
- Al-Akhdam in Yemen
- Ragyabpa in Tibet (see Social classes of Tibet)
- Tanka (danhu) ("boat people") in Guangdong, Fuzhou Tanka in Fujian, si-min (small people) and mianhu in Jiangsu, Gaibu and Duomin (To min) 惰民 duò mín ("idle/lazy/fallen/indent people") in Shijiazhuang, jinxing yum-in 九姓魚民 jiǔxìng yúmín ("nine name fishermen") in the Yangtze River region, yon-hoe ("music people") in Shani in China
- Osus in Nigeria and Cameroon

See also

- Affirmative action
- Underclass
- Outcast (person)
- Homo sacer

References

1. Peter Berger, Frank Heidemann. *The Modern Anthropology of India: Ethnography Themes and Theory* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=sBgLb8XIGR8C&pg=PA302&dq=forms+of+social+mobility+which+led+to+dalits+entry+into+mobility%20which%20led%20to%20dalits%20entry%20into&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjsqrHj7djVAhVBq48KHR-BT8Q6AEIJzAA#v=onepage&q=forms%20of%20social%20mobility%20which%20led%20to%20dalits%20entry%20into&f=false>) Routledge. p. 302.
2. Pinto, Sarah (2013). *Where There Is No Midwife: Birth and Loss in Rural India* (<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=5V-NssEMSsC&pg=PA47>). Berghahn Books. p. 47. ISBN 978-0-85745-448-5
3. Who are Dalits? & What is Untouchability? — Porta (<http://www.ncdhr.org.in/ncdhr/general-info-misc-pages/wadwiu>)
4. However, these claims have never been verified by any historical evidence!"Top RSS leader misquotes Ambedkar on untouchability" (<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/article-in-rss-mouthpiece-misquotes-ambedkar-on-untouchability/article1-1338054.aspx>)
5. Kumar, Ravinder. "Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Poona pact, 1932." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 8.1-2 (1985): 87-101.
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-last-untouchable-in-europe-878705.html>

Retrieved from '<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Untouchability&oldid=830146206>

This page was last edited on 13 March 2018, at 01:07.

Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.