

## The Caste Connection of Student Suicides in Educational Institutions



Photo: S. Anand, Outlook, February 01, 2016

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## Lead Essay

### The Caste Connection of Student Suicides in Educational Institutions

#### Introduction:

The suicide by Rohith Vemula, a student of University of Hyderabad (UoH) grabbed headlines a few weeks ago. The caste angle added a different dimension to the suicide. According to media reports, a group of students belonging to the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) got into a scuffle with the students of a political group- the ABVP. Following this the administration and Union government took action against the students of Ambedkar Student Association who were involved in the fight but none from the other political party were punished. It was reported in media that the ASA has been active and vocal in the campus since the 1990s and has raised various socio-political issues including caste-based harassment. But, now their activities were suddenly described as anti-national and casteist by the university and a union minister. The association draws its members both from SC/ST and non-SC/ST category of students in University of Hyderabad. However, in the name of disciplinary action only five Dalit students of the association were targeted. They were suspended from a session, restricted from entering academic block of the university, evicted from hostel and their fellowship was stopped. The continuous harassment of these four Dalit students resulted in Rohith Vemula committing suicide (one among five victims) on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.

Harassment of Dalit students in UoH followed by suicide of Rohith Vemula is not a unique incident. Cases of caste-based harassment followed by suicides of victims of casteism have been reported repeatedly from various Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in India in last few decades. There is no official data on cases of harassment of suicide due to casteism in HEIs, but it has taken lives of many SC/ST students in the last few decades. There have been efforts in the past to prevent caste-based harassment of students especially in higher education institutions but either they were not implemented at all or implemented half-heartedly. The prevalent caste discrimination in higher education institutions and an ineffective supportive system for SCs and STs has been negatively affecting thousands of students belonging to these communities. Those unable to cope up with this every-day discrimination in these institutions either have dropped or have taken the extreme step of taking their lives out of frustration and depression. The present article attempts to explore the caste connection behind the suicide of SC/ST students and reasons behind these increasing cases of suicide despite having specific anti-discrimination policies for HEIs.

#### The Caste Factor in Relation to Suicides in HEIs

Caste discrimination in HEIs is one of the significant factors behind suicides among students in various campuses. There is no official data on suicides in HEIs followed by caste harassment. However, various analyses reveal that most of students who have committed suicide in last few years hail from SC and ST communities. Insight Foundation in 2013 published a list of SC/ST students who committed suicide from 2007 to 2011 in various HEIs. According to the list, 18 SC/ST students killed themselves in 16 different institutions. Interestingly most of these suicides were carried in prestigious medical and engineering institutions such as AIIMS and Vardhman Mahavir Medical College of Delhi, engineering institutions like various IITs, IISc and central universities such as UoH and BHU (Counter Current, 2011). Jeevna (2013) has estimated that out of 45-50 thousands students in various IITs, 4-5 students are committing suicide every year. Around 90 per cent of these students killing themselves are SC, ST and OBC. It has been reported that Rohith Vemula is the ninth SC student of UoH, to have committed suicide in last 10 years.

Increasing suicides among SC/ST students in HEIs is one of the outcomes of caste-based discrimination in these institutions. Various SC/ST students in last 10-15 years have been complaining about differential treatment to students from reserved category in various educational institutions. However, these institutions have been denying any form of caste-discrimination in their campuses. Moreover, the current NDA government has also refused to accept the existence of caste-based discrimination in educational institutions managed and financed by the Government. Responding to a question on reasons behind high drop-out rate of students in NITs and IITs, the minister of MHRD, Ms. Smriti Irani did not mention caste as a factor behind it (India Today, 2015). No matter what administrations of HEIs and MHRD says, but facts reveals that there is high level of caste-based discrimination in our educational institutions. Facts gathered by

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some official inquiry committees in past have found that upper-caste faculties and students discriminate against SC/ST students.

In year 2006, few SC and ST students of AIIMS, New Delhi complained about differential treatment based on caste by the institution. Taking it seriously, the Government of India constituted a three members inquiry committee under the leadership of Prof S. K. Thorat to enquire into allegation of differential treatment of SC/ST students in AIIMS. The Prof Thorat committee report found that SC and ST students have been discriminated in various academic and co-curricular activities of AIIMS. According to the report nearly 69 percent SC/ST students reported that teachers discriminate them. 76 per cent SC/ST students reported that the examiner had asked their caste in their oral exams. Even though ragging is officially banned in the AIIMS, there appears to be a month of unofficial ragging. Students of SC/ST category have stated that ragging has serious caste overtones and several forms of humiliation are meted out to them.

A survey in 2013-14 by a student group called 'Insight Foundation' found similar patterns of caste discrimination in IIT-Bombay campus. The survey by Insight Foundation was conducted among first year students (2013-14 batch) belonging to various SC, ST and OBC categories. The survey revealed that an **alarming 56 per cent of them feel discriminated against in the institution**, albeit in a discreet manner (Shrivastava, 2014). **Nearly 60 percent of those in reserved category also said that they experienced more academic pressure than those in the non-reserved category.**

In 2010, 35 Dalit medical students of Delhi's Vardhman Mahavir Medical College repeatedly failed in the same subject – Physiology. Moreover, the college administration denied entertaining their grievances. Therefore, finally concerned students approached the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and sought its intervention. The commission appointed Rajya Sabha MP, Prof. B. C. Mungekar as commissioner to inquire into grievances of students of the medical college. The report submitted by Prof Mungekar unequivocally concluded that in this case, the Vardhan Mahavir Medical College practiced caste discrimination. Speaking to Hindu on this issue, Prof Mungekar told, "For the first time, a report has named the names. I have recommended four names for suspension and the invoking of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (Gaikwad, 2012)." The report reads:

*".....the faculty of the said department 'resorted to caste-based discrimination and neglected the duties assigned to them, not by omission but by commission'. Even other administrative people, including the head of the institution, had not seen fit to intervene. Not only did the students lose years because of this apathy, shockingly, the same authorities were guilty of showing leniency towards general category students (Gatade, 2012)"*

The Vardhman Mahavir Medical College has a history of practicing caste discrimination. In another case 25 scheduled caste students who had taken admission in 2004 and 2005 also declared as failed in same subject- Physiology. Students cried foul and approached court against such discrimination. "Under the instruction from the Delhi High court the college was forced to conduct fresh examination; 24 students out of 25 passed (Gatade, 2012)." In 2011, another enquiry committee headed by Dr L R. Murmu looked into ongoing discrimination at the college. Shockingly, the committee found that in the previous five years all the students who had failed the physiology paper belonged to the backward/scheduled caste. It was found that a student had failed for three years consecutively only by one mark. Other member of the committee also found that students who had failed the physiology paper had performed well in other subjects and got admission in the college because of their high marks (Gatade, 2012).

In the above mentioned investigation reports of caste-based discrimination, the unanimous conclusion have been that there is rampant discrimination against SC and ST students in HEIs. There is a long list of institutions that were found treating SC/ST students differently and victimizing them on the basis of caste. Victims who fought back against prevailing injustice in various institutions exposed the casteisms in academics.

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### **Policies and their Implementation:**

The caste-discrimination in educational institution is subtle and therefore complex to address. Understanding the complexity of issue, the University Grant Commission (UGC) brought two major regulations in 2012 to address caste based discrimination in various universities and colleges. These regulations are **UGC (Promotion of Equality in Higher Education Institutions) Regulation, 2012** and **UGC (Grievance Redressal) Regulation, 2012**. Similarly, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) brought (Establishment of Mechanism for Grievance Redressal) Regulations, 2012 to address such issues in technical institutions.

The Promotion of Equality in Higher Education Institution Regulation, 2012 is applicable to all institutions of higher education in India and it seeks proactive efforts by each institution to promote equality and ensure action against any case of caste-based discrimination in their campus. The regulation provides mechanism to punish person discriminating students based on caste, creed, religion and sex. The Grievance Redressal Regulation, 2012 notified by UGC and AICTE on the other hand has developed a mechanism for universities and colleges to redress various kinds of grievances of students. It empowers university to appoint an ombudsman for redressal of grievances of students under this regulation. At the college level, the vice-chancellor of an affiliating university has the responsibility to constitute grievance redressal committee consisting of five members for an individual college or a group of college.

It is been now around four years since these three regulations were framed by the UGC and AICTE in 2012. However, the implementation of these regulations by various HEIs leaves much to be desired. Human rights organization 'People's Watch', based in Tamil Nadu on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2016 revealed that not a single HEIs in Tamil Nadu has implemented the UGC (Promotion of Equality in Higher Education Institutions) Regulation, 2012. People's Watch report reads, "People's Watch categorically accuses that not even one of the 21 universities and 29 deemed universities in Tamil Nadu and no institution of higher learning follows these regulations and no awareness has been created on the said issue."<sup>1</sup> NUEPA faculty members Sabharwal and Malish C.M (2016) in their study have found that most of such regulations in HEIs are not functional and certainly not effective. They argued that there is limited institutional-level planning, monitoring and coordination of the cells constituted under various regulations and laws (Sabharwal and CM, 2016). It is interesting to note here that AICTE has not adopted any specific regulation to address issues of caste-based harassment in technical institutions (such as UGC, Promotion of Equality in HEIs, Regulation, 2012). However, data suggests that technical institutions have recorded more cases of caste-based harassment in the past. Other than these three regulations, there are number of other schemes, regulations and laws such as equal opportunity cell, SC/ST (PoA) Act to prevent any kind discrimination and harassment in HEIs. Despite this large web of policy mechanisms, situation of SC/ST student remains the same.

### **Conflict between SC/ST Assertion and Upper caste Domination:**

#### Diverse Student Population in HEIs:

The access to education has been largely restricted to some powerful communities and castes in India. Poor and marginalized communities such as SCs, STs, OBCs ,various religious minorities and women had been deprived of education through various social, religious and cultural traditions and practices in past. The caste hierarchy had played an important role in deciding who can avail education consequently many were deprived of it. The Indian constitution in 1951 provided a framework to protect rights of these deprived communities including their right to access educational institutions. However, for a long period after enactment of the Constitution the educational status of deprived communities remained very poor because of various social, political, religious and infrastructural problems. In the last 10-20 years, India made remarkable progress in the sector of education. The MHRD data shows that the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of India in Higher Education has jumped almost double from 13.39 in 2006-07 to 23.6 in 2014-15. It indicates that the expansion of Higher Education Institutions has provided opportunity to the students of

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.peopleswatch.org/dm-documents/3students %20murder issue in Vilupuram.pdf](http://www.peopleswatch.org/dm-documents/3students%20murder%20issue%20in%20Vilupuram.pdf)

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weaker section to access higher education. The increased opportunity and accessibility for weaker sections can also be explained through a similar jump observed in the GER of deprived communities such as SCs and STs. During this period GER of SCs increased from 9.35 to 18.5 and for ST it has increased from 7.46 to 13.6. With this substantial jump in GER of SCs and STs in the last five years, number of SC students has increased by 46.6%. Similarly, the number of ST students has increased by 30.3% and OBC by 44.4% as against total increase of 21% during same period (see table below).

### Changes in Gross Enrollment in HEIs

Social Group	Total Enrollment		Absolute Change in total Enrollment	% change from 2010-11 to 2014-15
	2010-11	2014-15		
SC	3045125	4463734	1418609	46.6
ST	1208435	1586368	377933	31.3
OBC	7581696	10945061	3363365	44.4
Other	15664493	16277559	613066	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>27499749</b>	<b>33272722</b>	<b>5772973</b>	<b>21.0</b>

Source: MHRD

These figures reveal that the composition of students in higher educational institutions has changed significantly in last few years. Now, students from weaker communities have outnumbered dominant caste communities in HEIs of India. In last five years, the share of SC, ST and OBC students in higher education has increased by 7%. Students share from these communities has increased from 43.1% in 2010-11 to 51.1% in 2014-15 (see table below). Probably for the first time in the history of India, deprived communities share more than half of student population in HEIs. It tells about a transition of HEIs in the favour of weaker and assertion of these communities for their rights of education.

### Community Wise Enrollment in HEIs

Social Group	2006-07		2010-11		2014-15	
	Total Enrollment	% share	Total Enrollment	% share	Total Enrollment	% share
SC	1835351	11.8	3045125	11.1	4463734	13.4
ST	701734	4.5	1208435	4.4	1586368	4.8
OBC	-	-	7581696	27.6	10945061	32.9
Other	-	-	15664493	57.0	16277559	48.9
<b>All</b>	<b>15552519</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>27499749</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>33272722</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MHRD

### Prevailing Caste Monopoly in Administration of HEIs:

The transition of higher educational institutions in the favour of weaker and deprived section has not been an easy journey. The gradual increasing numbers of SC, ST and OBC students in HEIs was opposed on number of occasions. Campaign such as 'Youth for Equality' started in AIIMS, New Delhi is part of that opposition. Ever increasing cases of caste discrimination and harassment of SC/ST students in various HEIs by fellow students and faculties from higher castes reflect that many people who want to continue their domination in HEIs are unhappy about the rise of SCs, STs and OBCs. Now the question is how come inspite of the outnumbering the general category students majority of students belonging to the vulnerable communities in HEIs are still facing discrimination and harassment? Sabhawal and

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C.M (2016) explains it through their recent study. According to them faculties in HEIs is still dominated by powerful conservative communities. Their perception goes against the spirit of diversity. They have argued, “Based on meritocratic argument, students belonging to the Scheduled Castes — the former ‘untouchables’ — are now viewed as the ‘unteachables’ in higher education spaces.”

### Composition of Faculty/Teachers in HEIs

Social Group	2010-11		2014-15	
SC	52763	6.9	102534	7.2
ST	17202	2.2	30076	2.1
OBC	163482	21.4	352160	24.8
Other	531902	69.5	933619	65.8
<b>All</b>	<b>765349</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1418389</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MHRD

MHRD data related to social background of faculties/teachers in HEIs reveals that around 66% of them comes from privileged background (see table above). In last five years, the representation of SC/ST/OBC in teaching has changed marginally. Data indicates that at the students level transition in HEIs is faster compared to administration and teaching. There have been efforts to diversify faculties as well in HEIs but it remains very slow. UPA government in 2008 asked all IITs to introduce reservation in the teaching faculty for SC, ST and OBC. Despite this, many institutions and universities are reluctant to diversify its faculty. Responding to a question in Rajyasabha the Minister of MHRD, Ms. Smriti Irani has accepted that many teaching posts reserved for SC/ST in all IITs are vacant.<sup>2</sup>

### Category wise Total Sanctioned and Vacant Faculty Position in 39 Central Universities

As on 1.1.2015

Faculty Level		GEN	SC	ST	OBC	PWD	TOTAL
Professor	Total Sanctioned Post	1919	276	124	0	44	2363
	Total Vacant Post	885	238	113	-1	38	1273
	<b>% vacant post</b>	<b>46.12</b>	<b>86.23</b>	<b>91.13</b>		<b>86.36</b>	<b>53.87</b>
Associate Professor	Total Sanctioned Post	3728	560	271	0	101	4660
	Total Vacant Post	1409	454	244	0	86	2193
	<b>% vacant post</b>	<b>37.80</b>	<b>81.07</b>	<b>90.04</b>		<b>85.15</b>	<b>47.06</b>
Assistant Professor	Total Sanctioned Post	5595	1171	589	1772	189	9316
	Total Vacant Post	795	443	253	1042	108	2641
	<b>% vacant post</b>	<b>14.21</b>	<b>37.83</b>	<b>42.95</b>	<b>58.80</b>	<b>57.14</b>	<b>28.35</b>
Total Faculty	Total Sanctioned Post	11242	2007	984	1772	334	16339
	Total Vacant Post	3089	1135	610	1041	232	6107
	<b>% vacant post</b>	<b>27.48</b>	<b>56.55</b>	<b>61.99</b>	<b>58.75</b>	<b>69.46</b>	<b>37.38</b>

Source: Rajya Sabha, Unstarred Question No. 1985, Dated 16.3.2015

Category wise data of faculty member in all 39 Central Universities reveals absolute monopoly of upper caste in administration. Data shows that nearly eighty percent faculty member in these Central Universities belongs to upper caste. More than 50 per cent of faculty post reserved for SCs, STs and OBC are vacant (See table above). It seems that

<sup>2</sup> Rajya Sabha, Unstarred Question No. 1475, Dated 03.08.2015

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HEIs could not implement anti-discrimination policies notified by UGC and AICTE because they continued to be controlled by people from advantaged caste and communities. Diversification of student population is a sign of social transformation and these policies are crucial to promote this positive transformation. HEIs will have to respond this change in higher education by diversifying its faculty base.

### Conclusion

Harassment of SC/ST/OBC students in Higher Educational Institutions represents our social reality. It shows that how are they treated at community level, in villages and in cities. Caste system and caste-based discrimination is a reality in 21<sup>st</sup> century India. Millions of SCs, STs and OBCs have been suppressed, oppressed and harassed by few dominant peoples just because of their accident of birth. The recent death of Rohith Vemula of Hyderabad University is today merely a statistic - one among several other suicides. But, it is also a harsh reminder of the role caste still continues to play in education and the changes that are yet to come which will encourage students from SC/ST communities to be a part of mainstream education.

The remarkable increase in the number of SC/ST/OBC students in HEIs has challenged the traditional caste domination in educational campuses. With change in student population composition, students from deprived communities are able to assert their educational rights and voice for equal treatment. However, it seems that the various HEIs have not adequately responded to this desired transformation of higher education. Most of them are reluctant to diversify their faculty base and hence administrations remain dominated by privileged and dominant caste and communities. The current diverse composition of students in HEIs is a symbol of positive social transformation and it must be supported and encouraged. Case-based harassment in HEIs goes against the idea of this social transformation, therefore, it is the duty of administration of HEIs and governments to eradicate feelings of caste-antagonism. However, reported attitude/approach of HEIs in various highlighted cases of caste-based harassment in educational institutions exposes their insensitivity towards social, economical and cultural background of students from deprived communities. Despite several evidences, various HEIs have been ignoring the fact that casteism is a reality in their campuses. It seems that there is a struggle between majority of deprived communities (in the form of increased voice of SC/ST/OBC students) and privileged groups represented by upper-caste dominated administration/faculty in HEIs. Assertion for the rights to education by deprived community is a natural process and part of a positive social transformation; now, it is the responsibility of educational institutions to welcome it and diversify the composition of its administrators and teachers.

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## Headlines

### **If the Fertiliser Subsidy Were Abolished**

(Kanika Datta, *The Business Standard*, February 17, 2016)

In 2015, the government attempted to control the urea subsidy by mandating that manufacturers produce neem-coated urea to a minimum of 75 per cent of their total production, and allowed them to go up to 100 per cent. The fact that this bio-fertiliser can alleviate soil damage from the excessive leaching of nitrogen is important, but so is the fact that there has been no noticeable farmer distress - or protest - at the modest price rise of Rs 14 for a 50 kg bag. Given that small and marginal farmers, who account for 80 per cent of the farming community, are unlikely to afford a sharp rise in urea prices, the demand within industry and among analysts is to allow manufacturers to charge market-determined prices and switch to a user subsidy regime via a Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme targeted at small farmers.

Read more:

[http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/kanika-datta-if-the-fertiliser-subsidy-were-abolished-116021701182\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/kanika-datta-if-the-fertiliser-subsidy-were-abolished-116021701182_1.html)

Date Accessed: 19.2.2016

### **The Manufacturing Conundrum**

(Ishan Bakshi, *The Business Standard*, February 3, 2016)

Can the National Democratic Alliance's ambitious Make in India initiative succeed where others have failed? Can India reverse the decline in manufacturing? And if it does succeed, will it generate enough jobs to pull out millions of those currently employed in low productive jobs in agriculture? Recent trends in India suggest that the relationship between manufacturing and job creation may have weakened considerably. Between 2004-05 and 2009-10, employment in manufacturing actually fell by around 5 million. Gujarat was the only big manufacturing state where employment in manufacturing grew during the period.

Read more: [http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/ishan-bakshi-the-manufacturing-conundrum-116020301297\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/ishan-bakshi-the-manufacturing-conundrum-116020301297_1.html)

Date Accessed: 19.2.2016

## Governance & Development

### *POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE*

#### **BJP Strategizing to Take Nationalism Debate to Masses**

(Rakesh Mohan Chaturvedi, *The Times of India*, February 17, 2016)

Reeling under the opposition onslaught on alleged atrocities against Dalits and minorities in the present regime, the Modi government has got a new fillip due to the debate on nationalism sparked by the Afzal Guru controversy in Jawaharlal Nehru University and an unapologetic BJP has plans of raking up the issue nationwide in the coming days with the intention of rallying behind people, especially the youth, across various cross-sections.

The nationalism issue has not just enthused the BJP but also Sangh fountainhead RSS and a roadmap for wooing the people towards it in the name of patriotism is being prepared, sources said. BJP will also slam the Congress for its "anti-India" stance and policies in this campaign.

"Nationalism has always been the USP of both the RSS and the BJP. We have been proud of it since the inception of the party and will brook no insult or attack on it," a BJP general secretary said. BJP leaders say that not only has this debate come as a shot in the arm for it, but also given the party — that had witnessed a clear erosion of its support base since the stupendous victory in the Lok Sabha polls in 2014 — an opportunity to win back the support of the youth, irrespective of their caste affiliations.

Read More: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/BJP-strategising-to-take-nationalism-debate-to-masses/articleshow/51019431.cms>

Date Accessed: 17.02.2016

### *GOVERNMENT*

#### **Is the Attack on Soni Sori Part of a Larger Plan for Bastar?**

(Shikohi Agarwal, *TheWire*, 21 February, 2016)

These attacks on journalists, the Jagdalpur Legal Aid Group, Bela Bhatia and now Soni Sori mean one thing – the small window that Bastar had to communicate with the world, to be heard, is being shut down ruthlessly. Prior to this, the administration has also put pressure on the Communist Party of India and its leaders and activists. The notorious Salwa Judum, which was banned by the Supreme Court following a PIL, is being revived in all but name.

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/02/21/is-the-attack-on-soni-sori-is-part-of-a-larger-plan-for-bastar-22257/>

Accessed on 22.02.2016

#### **Centrist Polity, Decentred Politics**

(Ajay Gudavarthy, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 February, 2016)

How has Telangana fared in the last two years? The author's field visit suggests that water and agrarian distress continue to be an issue, with Muslims and the youth disillusioned with the government in the new state.

Read More: <http://www.epw.in/author/ajay-gudavarthy#sthash.gLhSjuTL.dpuf>

Accessed on 22.02.2016

## Governance & Development

### EDUCATION

#### **BJP Government Removes Western Poets and Urdu from Class VIII Textbooks in Rajasthan**

(Betwa Sharma, *The Huffington Post*, February 17, 2016)

In the first batch of revised textbooks, it was reported that the Rajasthan government has replaced works by acclaimed poets from the West with lesser known writers with a more regional flavour.

The books, which recently arrived at the state textbook depots in Ajmer, Udaipur, Dausa, Bharatpur and Jaipur, now include poems such as *My First Visit To The Bank*, *The Brave Lady of Rajasthan*, *Chittor*, *Sangita The Brave Girl* and *The Glory of Rajasthan*.

In the Hindi textbook of Class VIII, chapters with Urdu words have also been removed.

"Most of the Hindi chapters that were dropped were loaded with Urdu words, which were difficult for the students to understand," a member of the textbook committee said. "We were also directed to strike out those chapters whose theme revolves around a particular faith."

Read More: [http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/02/16/bjp-government\\_n\\_9249486.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=india](http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/02/16/bjp-government_n_9249486.html?utm_hp_ref=india)

Date Accessed: 17.02.2016

### ENVIRONMENT

#### **Decomposed Carcasses of Olive Ridley Turtles Spotted in Odisha**

(*The Hindu*, February 17, 2016)

Ahead of the mass nesting of Olive Ridley sea turtles, beaches off Gahirmatha coast have turned into graveyard for these delicate marine animals with thousands of decomposed carcasses spotted along a shoreline.

"Around 1,000 carcasses have so far been counted. Forest staff doing patrolling duty at 16 camps is counting the dead. The carcasses sighted at the tourist spots are being buried," a forest official said.

It is suspected that turtles are perishing due to trawl fishing. The species are often killed after getting entangled in fishing nets or getting hit by trawl propellers.

"A patrolling drive has been intensified to curb illegal fishing in turtles' habitation sea—zones. So far 35 fishing trawls have been impounded and 143 crew arrested", the DFO said.

Wildlife activists blame the fishing trawlers for the sorry state of affairs, saying when the turtles get entangled in speeding fishing trawlers and gill nets, the fishermen kill them with hammer blows to keep their costly nylon intact.

Read More: <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/decomposed-carcasses-of-olive-ridley-turtles-spotted-in-odisha/article8248611.ece?homepage=true>

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### AGRICULTURE

#### **Weather-Weary Indian Farmers Resort to New Cash Crop – Blood**

(Shuriah Niazi, *Reuters*, February 17, 2016)

For many farmers in this part of Bundelkhand, blood is the new cash crop – a source of guaranteed income as they exhaust other ways of making ends meet.

## Governance & Development

In India, blood donors are not usually paid. But some hospitals buy blood, even though it is against the law.

Bundelkhand, a hilly region divided between the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, has struggled with extreme weather in the past few years. Drought, hailstorms, unseasonal rainfall and most recently an unusually warm winter have played havoc with crop yields, making farming unviable for many.

Unemployment has soared, and locals are leaving the rural belt to work as unskilled labour in nearby urban areas. Financial assistance provided by the authorities has failed to achieve much on the ground, as it is far lower than farmers' losses.

Farmer Lakhan Ahirwar, 61, relies on intermittent labouring jobs to get through dry spells. But when work is scarce, selling his blood is the most reliable source of income. "I could not find any work for almost five days," he said. "What should I do? I had to feed my children."

Rajendra Singh, a prominent water conservationist and winner of the Stockholm Water Prize, said it was "a matter of grave concern that farmers from many areas in Bundelkhand (have) sold their blood due to successive droughts".

Read More: <http://www.reuters.com/article/india-drought-agriculture-bundelkhand-jh-idUSKCN0VQ0RK>

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## Society

### **GENDER**

#### **The Council ----- in Thrall of King Tereus**

(Pragya Singh, *Outlook*, February 22, 2016)

A powerful man with serious criminal charges, including that of sexual harassment pending against him, has got sanction from one of India's most respected environment research bodies. He has clawed his way back despite serious legal, moral, and corporate governance issues. Worse, the topmost executive position has been carved out by TERI's governing council, packed with illustrious veterans of India Inc—Naina Lal Kidwai, Hemendra Kothari and Deepak Parekh—for the first time, especially for Pachauri.

Pachauri's new role is all the more damaging for TERI as its own internal complaints committee had confirmed this complainant's allegations. As per the law, if this committee confirms sexual harassment charges, then it may recommend disciplinary action. TERI's committee did recommend disciplinary action against Pachauri. "However, the governing council did no such thing. Instead it allowed him to go on voluntary leave and subsequently appointed him to the newly created post of executive vice-chairman," says Indira Jaising, the senior advocate representing the complainant. In this way, Pachauri's new role falls foul of the law.

Undoubtedly here is an instance of a club of the powerful and influential. But what is still more shocking is how TERI's eminent governing council, funded by the public, chose not to speak out for a woman fighting a lonely battle for the very basics—her own dignity and that of millions of women showing up at offices every day.

Read More: <http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-council-in-thrall-of-king-tereus/296652>

Date Accessed: 17.02.2016

#### **The Diversity Advantage**

(Bourree Lam, *The Atlantic*, February 16, 2016)

New research shows that there's one reason why companies might want to hire a lot more women, especially at the higher ranks: It's good for the bottom line. That's the finding of a massive study by the Peterson Institute for International Economics and the accounting firm EY. The study looked at nearly 22,000 publicly traded companies in 91 countries, and found a correlation between the number of women in executive positions and a company's profitability.

"The research demonstrates that while increasing the number of women directors and CEOs is important, growing the percentage of female leaders in the C-suite would likely benefit the bottom line even more," said Stephen Howe, EY's U.S. Chairman, in a press release.

Overall, the study found a dearth of women in corporate leadership positions. In the sample, 60 percent of companies had no female board members, and 50 percent had no female top executives. A female CEO was even harder to find: Less than 5 percent of the 22,000 companies had one. While the study saw no increase in profitability for companies led by female CEOs, it concluded that having women on corporate boards and C-level ranks was associated with better performance.

Read More: <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/02/female-leadership-earnings/462648/>

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#### **Kerala's First Women's Trade Union**

(Anima Muyarath, *The Economic and Political Weekly*, February 13, 2016)

The Asanghaditha Mekhala Thozhilali Union (AMTU), Kerala, a women's trade union, applied for registration on 18 January 2016 and received it on 30 January 2016. Even though Kerala has a long history of trade union movements this is the first time that a women's trade union has been recognised in the state. The continued neglect by the mainstream and male-dominated trade unions towards the issues faced by women workers in the unorganised sector is one of the major reasons behind the union's formation.

Read more: <http://www.epw.in/journal/2016/7/letters/keralas-first-womens-trade-union.html#sthash.6UfE4TF2.dpuf>

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## India and World

### *INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS*

#### **Whistle-blower's Victory**

*(The Frontline, March 4, 2016)*

The WGAD in its rules considered the period of Assange's deprivation of liberty from mid-2012, when he was arrested by the U.K. police and detained in solitary confinement in London for 10 days following the issue of a EAW against him. Assange's case, the U.N. panel argued, met all five criteria that established the denial of liberty. It said that Assange had been "subjected to different forms of deprivation of liberty: initial detention in Wandsworth prison which was followed by house arrest and his confinement at the Ecuadorean Embassy". It deemed his detention as violative of specific clauses of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Read more: <http://www.frontline.in/world-affairs/whistleblowers-victory/article8232401.ece?homepage=true>

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## Opinions/ Books

### OPINIONS

#### Twitter and the Re-Branding of Narendra Modi

(*The Economic and Political Weekly*, February 20, 2016)

Modi's use of Twitter aligns with the view that leadership campaigns can be a persuasive informative tool, rather than one people actually learn from. Twitter in this case emerges as a signalling mechanism for younger urban Indians, who like young urbanites elsewhere show higher political apathy than their rural counterparts. This ties with literature on the role of social media in potentially reversing political apathy among young citizens in democracies.

Read more: [http://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2016\\_51/8/Twitter\\_and\\_the\\_Rebranding\\_of\\_Narendra\\_Modi\\_0.pdf](http://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2016_51/8/Twitter_and_the_Rebranding_of_Narendra_Modi_0.pdf)

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