

INDIA UNTOUCHED

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Abstract

The study presents a research documentary "India Untouched" of Stalin K., which focuses on the connection between caste and urban spatial development. In the documentary "untouched India", it is unusual to observe the middle class and caste in the city and the caste system existing in their country or even in the urban space. The documentary also shows that the "team work" considered by society is still done by the lower classes. For example, in the documentary, it is shown that they work for a municipal corporation in Punjab, and their safai karmachari comes from a lower caste, not a higher caste. The documentary also mentions that although the Dalit community has taken national affirmative actions through reservations, it is still unable to develop, empower and liberate because people continue to question its merits. This study also covers some personal experiences.

Keywords: India Untouched, Discrimination, Caste-System, Urban Space, Reservation.



Introduction

The documentary titled '**India Untouched**' according to me is an excellent piece of work by Stalin that depicts the theme of caste discrimination, untouchability and plight of the lower caste which is still massively prevalent in our country. Spanning eight states and four religions, the documentary depicts the continued oppression of Dalit, 'the broken people' who suffer the burden of the caste system being regarded as 'untouchables'.

As far as the depiction of theme is considered, I think the documentary completely justifies the theme of untouchability which is depicted in the form of very accurate examples from different parts of the country. It covers villages and towns from southern, northern and Western states and even the larger metros, these examples show in numerous forms of discrimination. Information from different parts of India has been taken in a very informal manner so that there could not be any kind of fake impact which could create a translucent image on the viewers. Some states like Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala are highlighted in the aspect to describe the word **India Untouched** that is untouchability which has been considered as a crime by the Indian Constitution before so long but still is practiced in India in different parts in different ways.

Critical Thought

As far as the depiction of theme is considered I think the documentary completely justifies the theme of untouchability which is portrayed in the form of very exact examples from different parts of the country. It covers villages and towns from southern, northern and western states and even the larger metros. These examples show in numerous forms of discrimination beginning with symbolism like Dalit not being allowed to enter tea stalls and temples and having to get down from their cycles and take their shoes off in upper caste areas to the issues of marriage and education. The lack of opportunities for the lower caste is showed in the footages of the rural schools where the teacher discriminates between the students based on the caste. The lower caste students are not only forced to sit back but also brutally beaten and punished for even minor mistakes whereas even the major sins of upper castes are



ignored. Also there is no access to medical facilities to the Dalit as the hospitals are very far and there have been cases of children dying on the way to hospital. The better part about the documentary is that it had interviewed the Banaras scholar and other Hindu scholars who interpret the Hindu scriptures particularly 'Manusmriti' to mean that the Dalit have no right of education and force upon them the tasks like manual scavenging.

The very first scene of the film in which the innocent children are seen, wherein even the message that comes out of the mouth of these children are nothing else but that "We will be polluted if we touch them". So, the question rises again. Who are considered to be the "we" section and the "them" section of the society? Who has the authority to decide that the certain section of a particular society belongs to the label of "untouchable"? The name of this documentary movie suggests that the practice of untouchability still continues in our society and is brutally accepted as a part of culture in certain places. The first scene of the movie ends with the question of a child who honestly asks this question: "What is this Untouchability?". Because as far as he is concerned this concept of untouchability made him isolated from his fellow mates at a very young age. This is all what he is aware of this concept and he poses this as a question at the end of the very first scene of this film. As an answer to this question, the next scene of the film takes our attention to Benares, the land of holiness and sanctity, which is considered as the spiritual capital of India, wherein this concept of "untouchability" is more political and social by all means. And there we are introduced to a new character called Batuprasad Shastri who himself belongs to the upper caste and he speaks about the concrete concept of "untouchability" working out in that area according to his own view point which as a common man, i personally found it as totally "illogical". He introduces himself as a fundamentalist Hindu Brahmin and asserts his own concepts about caste hierarchy.

This scene is followed by the sudden appearance of **Manusmriti** message on the screen, that:
"From his mouth God created the Brahman, from his arms the Kshatriya, from his thighs the Vaishya and from his feet the Shudra".

This is repeated by that "great" scholar in order to remind the viewers about the power relations existing in the society in terms of caste. From there directly the filmmaker starts exploring the ways and means of different states and how this practice of "untouchability" is followed there. Starting from the state of Tamil Nadu, it is clearly shown that even the low-class people are not even allowed to use slippers while walking through the land of the upper caste people. Situation is not different in Gujarat where the Dalits are not allowed to travel along with the upper caste people in the same taxi. A lady shares her experience of working in a Brahmin family where she is asked to sit outside the house for having food and the amount paid for her is just hundred rupees for the entire work. One can easily understand the ways and means of humiliation experienced by the lower-class people in Bihar with the depiction of this single event. Again, in the state of Bihar in a place called Jhajha, a young man shares his better experience by saying that the harijans are the people who work day and night by cleaning all the filth and dirt but again it is the harijans only who suffer a lot when compared to the life of the upper caste people who work in decent and dignified ways.

The film destroys any illusions one might have about caste discrimination being a primarily rural phenomenon, enforced through rituals of purity and pollution. It is shocking to know that discrimination is seen even in premier institutions like JNU. The experiences of a doctor who is subjected to discrimination on the basis of caste is the perfect example to show the 'operation' of caste in a sophisticated way in the present-day world. The doctor calls it "Hi-tech discrimination": even highly educated and meritorious Dalits are also subjected to untouchability and discrimination. In the light of these incidents, even education is not going to eradicate discrimination and untouchability. The prevalence of discrimination on the lines of caste in states like Kerala - which is recognized as a progressive state for its cent percent literacy, development and communism - is astonishing. It is shocking to know that even now in this so-called globalised world, Dalits are being denied a basic right like being allowed to draw drinking water from public wells.

This particular statement from Manusmriti conveys the brutal concept of inequality existing in the Indian society which believes in the existence of "Lokasamastha Sukhinobhavandu". Again, there arises a question like what if these lower-class people are educated. Whether there will be the so-called equality? The answer to this question is also portrayed by the filmmaker in this documentary film by introducing us to a doctor called Yadulal who shares his bitter experience of getting avoided by the senior staffs and the junior fellow mates. It's so disgusting to note down the fact that even if a person is raised to the level of sophistication by means of education but still the blind faith of caste hierarchy makes him politically and socially inferior in the society.

Even the film portrays the reality seen in the daily newspapers in which it is highlighted that the people give concrete details about their caste and religion in order to be married. This is the reality in India where anything and everything is dependent on caste. Let it be marriages, professional skills or life in total, the standard of one's life depends upon the caste which he/she belongs to. Another man explains how the concept of Caste and Untouchability works out among the Muslim community. He is of the opinion that even if educated the lower community people who belongs to the community barbers, blacksmiths and washer men will never ever be accepted by the upper caste people like Syeds and Sheikhs. This shows the untold caste discrimination happening among the



Muslim community. This short documentary ended up with an ever shocking and brutal story of a lady who was raped in the name of caste system but still who continues to struggle in her life to make her daughter happy.

As per the documentary “India Untouched”, in this it is shown that the survey is done in eight different states and the surveyor travelled 25,000 km to show how deep the term “Untouchability” and its meaning is deep rooted in the mind and heart of people and existence in everywhere irrespective of pace, locality, status that is village or city, rich or poor people, educated or uneducated, the feeling of thought of untouchability prevails in each and every part of surroundings.

After watching the documentary, I come to know that some issues of Untouchability: In these states which are very shocking and heart threatening but these are only few issues which we saw but there are more instances of untouchability which are unseen or hidden from us.

According to my opinion, untouchability still exists in our society either in the rural area and the urban area as well, in urban areas the techniques for untouchability has changed, for example, they don't say to lower caste people that don't drink water in our house or don't enter my house, so, from this it is seen that **physical untouchability** is demolished but the **segregation of living spaces** still exists in the urban society.

The term “**Untouchability**” refers to the population shift from rural to urban area that means the gradual increase in the proportion of people living in the urban areas and the way in which society adopts to the change. In today's era, urbanisation has made the people highly educated and has changed their living standard but till now untouchability is the issue in the society.

The practice of untouchability is not different in both the rural and urban areas, the only difference is the techniques and way of presenting, showing or describing the untouchability is different.

In rural areas the people present the physical untouchability, like the upper caste and class of society do not interact with the lower caste and class of society whereas in urban areas the untouchability is presented by segregating their living spaces.

In this documentary it is shown that in some of the temples dalits are not allowed to enter the temple. One question arises in my mind is that – **Is this the correct thing to do with the lower caste people and is this their fault?**

Now I am going to share some incidents from my home town state (Bihar): One of the **Chief Minister of Bihar – Mr. Jitan Ram Manjhi** was from dalit caste. Once he went to a temple - Garib Nath temple which is situated in Muzaffarpur but the priest over there didn't allow him to enter he temple because he was from dalit caste. So he returned back from the stair case itself. While he was coming downstairs the priest started to purify the stairs with holy water (Ganga Jal) in front of him only. This is very shameful incident that the **CM** of the state is not allowed to enter the temple because of **his caste**.

After being well educated and he was also the **CM** of the state at that time then also he didn't get that respect from the society which he deserved because of his lower caste, so **how will the normal people of lower caste will be able to survive in the society?**

Another instance- Bihar's first female **CM Rabari Devi**, who is an illiterate, who do not know how to do her signature and she use thumb impression for signing instead of signature. The irony is this that after being an illiterate person she had all the benefits and she was respected by her society because she belonged to an upper class of the society. So, **the point is that the value of the education doesn't matter, what matters is the caste of a person.**

Case Study of City in Haryana(Real Incident)

In Haryana and has seen the practices of untouchability and caste discrimination in rural parts of my district though untouchability was hardly about touching another human being, even 15 years back. It was more about time and place. People from some lower castes were not allowed inside house, definitely not around prayer rooms, kitchen or grain storage. Separate housing areas made sure that the lower caste people were not around during religious activities. Now the scenario has changed but still Inter-caste marriages is a taboo and manual scavenger are discriminated in some rural parts. Some of recent cases are:

- In 2015, a teenager was hacked to death on before a 'khap' panchayat in Rohtak district of Haryana for being in love with his neighbour's daughter in the month of September.
The murder was executed for not adhering to "existing norms" which only accepts legal marriage arranged by parents. Commands leading to honour killing has affected many lives across many states. According to a report, more than 1000 young people are killed in India, every year.
- Though Haryana has always proclaimed itself a progressive state that shuns caste-based discrimination at all levels. But the harassment of a Dalit family last year by villagers as well as the police contradicts the claims. The family of Mahipal Kangra,



which belongs to the Valmiki caste, was been socially ostracised and forcefully prevented from carrying out economic activities for six months in Meham village of Paschim Rohtak district. The harassment had been going on since Madhav, son of Mahipal Kangra, dared to marry an upper caste girl named Ronita eight months before the incident. After the marriage, the local 'Village Sabha' (equivalent to Haryana's Khap panchayat) ordered a boycott of the Kangra family and snatched their livelihood. The family has been prevented from working in the fields or running a shop provided by the gram panchayat. The Kangra said though they had lodged a complaint at the police station, the boycott had still not ended.

- A Hari girl and a Brahmin boy had ended life in Bahu Akbar Pur in West Rohtak district four years ago due to caste-related harassment after marriage.

One heart touching incident shown in Satyamev Jayate

It is shown in one of the episodes of Satyamev Jayate that- to contribute in a developing country that India, one Dalit boy whose name is Balwant Singh decided to be an IAS officer and contribute his part in the development in the way. So after studios work he became an IAS officer and he thought that discrimination on the basis of caste and untouchability will not be there in educated society but he was wrong and he himself experienced the deep rooted feeling of untouchability in his career. Because of untouchability, he resigned his post after five years as he felt discriminated from his staff members. The incident was that, although he was designated to a prestigious and respected post of IAS, he felt alienated from that place. He said in the episode that **"Har kadam par main ek afsar jaroor tha, par IAS main baad mai tha, pehle ek Dalit tha, IAS to bas mere ek roti khane ka sadhan tha, aatmasamman (selfrespect) ka sadhan nahi ban saka"**

According to the survey done in the documentary which is directed by **Stalin K.**, many people in these states gave a statement that they think the **education will demolish untouchability in the society**. But the education level in south especially Kerala is much more than in any other areas that is **93%**, then **why there is so much of untouchability and discrimination in castes in Kerala after being a well-educated state?**

Prevalence of Untouchability in Hindu Society

Many believers believes that the untouchability is seen more among the Hindu Society because it is written in their **Manusmriti** and **Shashtra** and one of the believers whose name is **Batuprasad Sharma Shastri** introduces himself very proudly that he is the Disciple of Swami Kripatriji Maharaj and also the chief of Tulsi Manas Temple. He was also the General Secretary of the Scholars Association in Varanasi. He introduced himself as a **believer of the Shastras** (Holy Scriptures).

But the most shocking thing was that he clearly said that he believes in caste system as well as untouchability and pointed a man making clay pots. He started explaining the origins of different castes according to mythology which was Manu's Law and said the Almighty created the Brahmins from his mouth (priest), from his arms Kshatriya (rulers), from his thighs the vaishyas (commoners), and from his feet the **Shudras (servant)**.

The irony which continues here is that he clearly said that these believes like caste discrimination and untouchability can never be out of the society because dalits, Shudras have no rights to study and live with the same prestige which upper caste people sustains. And government talks about the schemes like 'Sab padhe Sab badhe'. What about the humiliations faced by the backward class people who are getting tortured by such people like Batuprasad. There is a very big question mark on the Indian Constitution which says that performance of untouchability can amount to punishment. Similarly, various cases from different parts of our country have been elaborated below.

According to my opinion from the documentary I would like share my thought that untouchability is not only in Hindu Religion but I see in every other religion also. Some of them re mentioned below

The Christian Religion

This is known to be a very modern religion, this religion always teaches everyone to get well educated and to know about their rights like right to equality etc. according to documentary, one family of Bihar said that they feel discriminated by the society, for example there are different churches for Roman Catholics (upper class), SC/ST/OBC (lower caste). If the lower caste person goes to the upper caste worship pace, they feel discriminated.

Islam Religion

Now talking about Islam religion, there is also untouchability in their society and religion. In the documentary, it shows about the Muslim family, they say that untouchability is deep rooted in their religion as they explain one instance that when they go for their Nawaz in mosque, they are united by their religion but after coming out of the mosque it is seen that untouchability prevails everywhere.



Sikh Religion

According to the documentary, untouchability is present in their religion also, there are different entrance gate for upper and lower caste people in their worship places.

Is this the correct thing which the society does to the people? When will this matter of untouchability will be solved in the society? When will the society will be educated in respect of their mind-set?

There are provisions given in Constitution that is Constitutional Rights and among them few are stated below

Article 14-Equality before law

The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 17-Abolition of Untouchability: "Untouchability" is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

Article 46- Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections.

And thus, many other Articles under the Constitution of India have been added and amended along the years. It took years to set the rules or find the rights of the backward classes of the society.

Even our constitution speaks and stands against the discrimination towards the lower castes. It has therefore, provided certain laws for protecting the rights of every individual.

Conclusion

Untouchability in Indian society rests upon the idea of superiority of one section of people over another on account of their birth. The caste system in India denies human status to its fellow beings and treats them worse than animals.

I belong to a small village in Bihar where today also untouchability is followed in their culture by the people over there. I have experienced untouchability in my native place, for example: some Rajput and Brahmins people who reside, there are highly educated and they are honoured among the village. They are IAS, bank manager, station master, advocates and others are also on a good post in government sector.

On the other hand, after being highly educated and well qualified, till now they follow the practice of untouchability among themselves.

I want to share my personal experience which I faced in my village, few years back my parents organized a function in which they invited the whole village, the Rajput and Brahmins also came there, we tried our best to provide good facilities to them. When we called every one for dinner, they created a seen that they won't have dinner in our place because we belong to lower caste and they are Rajput and Brahmin, they told that if you want us to eat then you must have arranged food in the house of any Brahmin.

After this incident my family faced discrimination among the society. This is not our mistake, this is the mistake of our society which discriminate people on the basis of their caste, religion, creed, sex, race etc.

In our society there still exist feeling of superiority of caste and birth. We can experience the practice of untouchability in everyday life around us, especially in rural and semi-urban areas of the country. Also, in big metro cities, the inhuman practice of manual scavenging is still there. The incidence shows that the evil practice is so deep rooted in Hindu society that even after 67 years of Independence is continuing in one form or other.

Disclaimer

This article doesn't harm nor stands against any religion, community, caste, race. This article totally based on research documentary of STALIN K. named as INDIA UNTOUCHED¹ and also Included some real incidents.

11 Stalin k. "India untouched" 15 December 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvke6ycgkL4>