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## Dalits: "Trained" to be empowered?

March 23, 2016, 1:50 PM IST

Rajiv Shah in True Lies | India | TOI

13

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The other day, after several months' gap, I visited Dalit Shakti Kendra, situated around 12 kms from the spot where the now-famous manufacturing plant of Tata Nano car is located. Situated away from Ahmedabad in a pollution free atmosphere, my purpose, unlike my earlier visits, which I had made to attend several rights' groups events held there, was very specific. I had come to know that 50-odd boys had come from different parts of rural India, mostly Dalits, to be trained in some sort of technical skill; alongside, they were also being "trained" to be empowered in their struggle against discrimination.

Belonging to poor families, these children seemed educated; majority of them had email id, which they immediately forwarded to me. They knew how to operate email on their smartphone. Naturally, they were more aware about the issues around them. I specifically avoided asking them about Rohith Verma, the new Dalit "icon" who had committed suicide under pressure allegedly from powerful sections, as I thought, that would divert the whole issue I had wished to explore – untouchability faced by them in their day to day life.

### Author

**Rajiv Shah**

As The Times of India representative in Gandhinagar, Gujarat's capital, Rajiv covered state government between 1997 and 2012. He believes what George Orwe...

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I could easily gauge: Discrimination was writ large on their face, whether it was distribution of water, entry into the temple, or getting haircut from the local barber. Asked to gather in a common reading room, they were frank, and had no compunction about expressing themselves.

This immediately made me take a quick "survey", asking them to raise their hands about the type of discrimination they faced. Twenty of them said they had to drink tea from separate cups set aside for "untouchables" in village tea stalls; 14 said temple entry in their village was banned; 12 said, Dalits had separate cremation grounds in their village; and 10 said they witnessed "violent attacks" on Dalits when they protested against an untouchability practice.

I then began asking them whether under the Swachh Bharat campaign, they were able to build toilets in their houses. To my surprise, nearly all of them said they do not have any toilet facility in their house. I was prompted to ask, why, and the quick reply was they did not get "necessary funds from the government" to construct toilets. A few of them even admitted, there wasn't enough space in their house to build toilets.

Interesting though it may seem, one of the boys, Arvind – who hails from Aruvuri village in Allahabad district – said, after Mayawati became the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, things changed for Dalits. For instance, now they could easily fetch water from the local source, unlike earlier, when they could not, and the village barber doesn't dare refuse haircut. Nor were there any violent clashes with the dominant caste people, he added. However, these changes have not affected the sanitary life. "Of the 250 Dalit households in a village of 1,500, just one per cent have toilets, as no funds have been given to us to build one", he said.

I was reminded of a [recent paper](#) "Demand for household sanitation: The case of India" by Anurag Banerjee, Nilanjan Banik and Ashvika Dalmia, which said, "Our results suggest among lists of household items that any individual want to have

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toilets get a lower preference – ranked 12, out of 21.” The household items which had higher choices were cot/bed, watch, mattress chair, bicycle, table, electric fan, television, pressure cooker, radio, and motorcycle/scooter. The paper adds, “Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Class (OBC) households have a lower probability of using a toilet when compared with households from general caste Hindu, Muslims and Christians.”

Unlike Uttar Pradesh’s two Dalits, those from other places had faced some untouchability, with a few facing violent attacks as well. One of them, who identified himself as Babloo, from a small village off Dehradun, said he faced “attacks from dominant castes” when he, as part of 150 others, tried entering into the local temple. Pointing out that it is the same temple, which he had helped build as mason, he said, “My father is a mason. I helped him build the temple in 2009. The temple management was reluctant to even pay us, saying it was religious work. And after we built the temple, our entry is banned”, adding, “Even today, I am threatened. It is dangerous for me to roam about alone.”

A similar tale was told by Mehul Rathod from Savda village in Patdi taluka of Gujarat, who said, “I did the painting work at the Ramji temple. They told us its God’s work, hence we shouldn’t charge any wages, though I managed to get my share. When it came to entering into the temple, we are barred.” He added, “This happened despite the fact that the village has a Dalit Sarpanch, who has been a campaigner against illegal sand mining from the protected forest area of the Rann of Kutch, situated in the neighbourhood. He took out a rally against illegal mining. About 10 of us were beaten up. One of us was hospitalized. Later, there was a wider protest. Today, there is permanent police company there to maintain peace.”

Other forms of discrimination prevailed widely. Ramsingh Sanehi from a rural area next to Pamgarh town in Chhattisgarh, said, the Dalits in the village from where he hails are not allowed to take water from the common water source, a well, when



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persons from the dominant castes are there. "We dare not touch their buckets. There have been police complaints, but things have not changed", he said. Making a similar complaint, Lalu Ravidas, who hails from Jharkhand's Navadi village, about 26 km away from Bokaro Steel Plant, said, "Our children are made to sit separately in schools." He added, as for toilets, "90 per cent of the households in the Dalit basti do not have them, with the government not providing the funds it had promised in order to build them."

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**ramnakhi pannawali** • 1556 •

• ggn • 89 days ago

discrimination will not end with empowering the dalits alone. the other side of the coin -- the upper caste has to be educated about the evils of discrimination and the error of their ways too. but ambedkar's limited vision or blind spot regarding reservations put a end to that. his was a revenge kind of solution, where the dalits replace the upper caste not mingle with them.

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**Lalit Bagai** • 4164 •

• 89 days ago

it is hard to believe that dalits remain so backward- they can change name, and move to big cities- they can open small businesses-even large- they seem to be under performers- perhaps bad dna.ambedkar studied in usa on scholarship given by ruler of baroda. - they get reservation in everything- just cant make it-

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**yuhu1** • 840 •

• Location • 89 days ago

dear author, the correct name is rohit and not rahul as you have mentioned.

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**Jagdip Vaishnav** • 34851 •

• Mumbai • 90 days ago

please note ,agitation, protests erupts when there is social, economic inequality , & when govt remains ineffective. if dalit are made to stay aloof, sit separately in colleges, universities ,unrest grows. if govt fund is being utilized for others ,7 not for dali , it is injustice. no community can tolerate .accept such partial treatment by the govt, why govt since govt is regulator ,has to monitor situation

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**Nikus Kumar Giri** • 4064 •

• Unknown • 90 days ago

low quality fiction by non-brained ba\$tard.....

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**Aar Kay** • 7086 •

• Dxb • 90 days ago

why are such authors repeating themselves when they say that discrimination exists between castes. this is a known fact and it has been happening for 4000 to 6000 years. this cannot change easily over night. we all know it is a bad thing to happen but just repeating will not solve the problem. the solution lies in educating these people so that they earn the right knowledge and skill sets to earn themselves some dignity and money. every political party has milked these so called dalits for decades and are happy to see them languishing. they blame the upper caste for their plight but what can the upper caste do? they are after all the product of the same system. only the government can do something,if they are serious. if not you will see the gap widening.

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**Deepak Jain** • 473 •

• Mumbai • 90 days ago

discrimination against dalits or any community is condemnable.but what i fail to understand is why these liberal authors everytime bring in names of rohit vemula and kanhaiya as dalit icons who shouted slogans in favour of yakub memon and afzal guru more than that for ambedkar.rather than advising them not to support anti national elements ( kashmiri/ pakistani) in their fight against caste domination these authors are treating them as icons.dalits should realise that the pakistani/ kashmiri/islamic elements who they think are their friends have no regards to freedom of speech and any rights for their marginalised sections like muslim women, ahmediyas, muhajirs etc.once their purpose is over , they will give you neither economic development nor any freedom just as you can see in pakistan.

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**parikshit** • 330 •

• 90 days ago

dalits and adivasis should understand that today only bsp can change face of this country. she is real successor of ambedkar as she has also faced discrimination. we should keep faith in our supreme leader the dr. b r ambedkar. follow each and every word of dr. ambedkar.jai bhim jai bharat.

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**Ashutosh Kumar** • 90147 •

• Unknown • 90 days ago

dalit can not be trained until they are free from shackles of hindu caste system

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**Arvind Upadhyay** • 6287 •

• Allahabad • 90 days ago

i object the findings ,writer should mention the resource and from where ,myself belongs to up as i knows no where in eastern up happens such things ,one thing is important only money, caste is becoming things of past. it is really bad journalism.

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**Devashish Joshi** • 1604 •

• 90 days ago

things should change fast or india can't grow.

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