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LECTURE 37:

The Problems of Marginalized Groups in India

INTRODUCTION Marginality is an experience that affects millions of people throughout the world. People who are marginalized have relatively little control over their lives, and the resources available to them. This results in making them handicapped in delving contribution to society. A vicious circle is set up whereby their lack of positive and supportive relationships means that they are prevented from participating in local life, which in turn leads to further isolation. This has a tremendous impact on the development of human beings, as well as on society at large. As the objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy a productive, healthy, and creative life, it is important to address the issue of marginalization. Development is always broadly conceived in terms of mass participation. Marginalization deprives a large majority of people across the globe from participating in the development. It is a complex problem, and there are many factors that cause marginalization. This complex and serious problem needs to be addressed at the policy level. This project deals with the problems associated with the groups suffering from marginalization and the ways to reduce them.

MEANING OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND MARGINALIZATION In general, the term ‘marginalization’ describes the overt actions or tendencies of human societies, where people who they perceive to undesirable or without useful function, are excluded, i.e., marginalized. These people, who are marginalized, from a GROUP or COMMUNITY for their protection and integration and are known as ‘marginalized groups’. This limits their opportunities and means for survival. Peter Leonard defines marginality as, “. . . being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity”. The Encyclopedia of Public Health defines marginalized groups as, ‘To be marginalized is to be placed in the margins, and thus excluded from the privilege and power found at the center’. Latin observes that “‘Marginality’ is so thoroughly demeaning, for economic well-being, for human dignity, as well as for physical security. Marginal groups can always be identified by members of dominant society, and will face irrevocable discrimination.” These definitions are mentioned in different contexts and show that marginalization is a slippery and multilayered concept. Marginalization has aspects in sociological, economic, and political debates. Marginalization may manifest itself in forms varying from genocide/ethnic-cleansing and other xenophobic acts/activities at one end of the spectrum, to more basic economic and social hardships at the unitary (individual/family) level. Of course, the forms of marginalization may vary—generally linked to the level of development of society; culturally, and as (if not more) importantly, with relation to economics. For example, it would generally be true, that there would exist more “marginalized” groups in the Third World”, and developing nations, that in the Developed/First-World nations. Indeed, there can be a distinction made, on the basis of the “choice” that one has within this context—those in the Third World who live under impoverished conditions, through no choice of their own (being far removed from the protectionism that exists for people in the First World,) are often left to die due to hunger, disease, and war. One can also add to this various minority, as well as women... Within the First World, low-income drug addicts stand out as being the most marginalized. This deliberate or chosen marginalization of people carries with it aspects of a so-called “Social Darwinism”. To further clarify the meaning and concept let us discuss certain characteristics of marginalized groups: Usually, a minority group has the following characteristics: 1) It suffers from discrimination and subordination. 2) They have physical and/or cultural traits that set them apart, and which are disapproved of, by a dominant group. 3) They share a sense of collective identity and common burdens. 4) They have shared social rules about who belongs, and who does not. 5) They have a tendency to marry within the group. Thus, marginalization is complex as well as a shifting phenomenon linked to social status.

VARIOUS MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND THEIR PROBLEMS Most vulnerable marginalized groups in almost every society can be summarized as below: 1. Women – Under different economic conditions, and under the influence of specific historical, cultural, legal and religious factors, marginalization is one of the manifestations of gender inequality. In other words, women may be excluded from certain jobs and occupations, incorporated

into certain others, and marginalized in others. In general, they are always marginalized relative to men, in every country and culture. Women (or, men) don't present a homogeneous category where members have common interests, abilities, or practices. Women belonging to lower classes, lower castes, illiterate, and the poorest region have different levels of marginalization than their better-off counterparts.

2. People with disabilities – People with disabilities have had to battle against centuries of biased assumptions, harmful stereotypes, and irrational fears. The stigmatization of disability resulted in the social and economic marginalization of generations with disabilities, and, like many other oppressed minorities, this has left people with disabilities in a severe state of impoverishment for centuries. The proportion of the disabled population in India is about 21.9 million. The percentage of the disabled population to the total population is about 2.13 percent. There are interstate and interregional differences in the disabled population. The disabled face various types of barriers while seeking access to health and health services. Among those who are disabled women, children and age are more vulnerable and need attention.

3. Schedule Castes (Dalits) – The caste system is a strictly hierarchical social system based on underlying notions of purity and pollution. Brahmins are on the top of the hierarchy and Shudras or Dalits constitute the bottom of the hierarchy. The marginalization of Dalits influences all spheres of their life, violating basic human rights such as civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. A major proportion of the lower castes and Dalits are still dependent on others for their livelihood. Dalits do not refer to caste but suggest a group who are in a state of oppression, social disability and who are helpless and poor. Literacy rates among Dalits are very low. They have meager purchasing power and have poor housing conditions as well as have low access to resources and entitlements. Structural discrimination against these groups takes place in the form of physical, psychological, emotional and cultural abuse which receives legitimacy from the social structure and the social system. Physical segregation of their settlements is common in the villages forcing them to live in the most unhygienic and inhabitable conditions. All these factors affect their health status, access to healthcare and quality of life. There are high rates of malnutrition reported among the marginalized groups resulting in mortality, morbidity, and anemia. Access to and utilization of healthcare among the marginalized groups are influenced by their socio-economic status within society. Caste-based marginalization is one of the most serious human rights issues in the world today, adversely affecting more than 260 million people mostly reside in India. Caste-based discrimination entails social and economic exclusion, segregation in housing, denial, and restrictions of access to public and private services and employment, and enforcement of certain types of jobs on Dalits, resulting in a system of modern day slavery or bonded labor. However, in recent years due to affirmative action and legal protection, the intensity of caste-based marginalization is reducing.

4. Scheduled Tribes – The Scheduled Tribes like the Scheduled Castes face structural discrimination within Indian society. Unlike the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are a product of marginalization based on ethnicity. In India, the Scheduled Tribes population is around 84.3 million and is considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Their percentages in the population and numbers, however, vary from State to State. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest, and water. They constitute a large proportion of agricultural laborers, casual laborers, plantation laborers, industrial laborers etc. This has resulted in poverty among them, low levels of education, poor health and reduced access to healthcare services. They belong to the poorest strata of the society and have severe health problems.

5. Elderly or Aged People – Aging is an inevitable and inexorable process in life. In India, the population of the elderly is growing rapidly and is emerging as a serious area of concern for the government and the policy planners. According to data on the age of India's population, in Census 2001, there are a little over 76.6 million people above 60 years, constituting 7.2 percent of the population. The number of people over 60 years in 1991 was 6.8 percent of the country's population. The vulnerability among the elderly is not only due to an increased incidence of illness and disability but also due to their economic dependency upon their spouses, children, and other younger family members. According to the 2001 census, 33.1 percent of the elderly in India live without their spouses. The widowers among older men form 14.9 percent as against 50.1 percent widows among elderly women. Among the elderly (80 years and above), 71.1 percent of women were widows while widowers formed only 28.9 percent of men. Lack of economic dependence has an impact on their access to food, clothing, and healthcare. Among the basic needs of

the elderly, medicine features as the highest unmet need. Healthcare of the elderly is a major concern for society as aging is often accompanied by multiple illnesses and physical ailments.

6. Children – Children Mortality and morbidity among children are caused and compounded by poverty, their sex and caste position in society. All these have consequences on their nutrition intake, access to healthcare, environment, and education. Poverty has a direct impact on the mortality and morbidity among children. In India, a girl child faces discrimination and differential access to nutritious food and gender-based violence is evident from the falling sex ratio and the use of technologies to eliminate the girl child. The manifestations of these violations are various, ranging from child labor, child trafficking, to commercial sexual exploitation and many other forms of violence and abuse. With an estimated 12.6 million children engaged in hazardous occupations (2001 Census), for instance, India has the largest number of child laborers under the age of 14 in the world. Among children, there are some groups like street children and children of sex workers who face additional forms of discrimination. A large number of children are reportedly trafficked to the neighboring countries. Trafficking of children also continues to be a serious problem in India. While systematic data and information on child protection issues are still not always available, evidence suggests that children in need of special protection belong to communities suffering disadvantage and social exclusion such as scheduled castes and tribes, and the poor (UNICEF, India).

7. Sexual Minorities – Another group that faces stigma and discrimination are sexual minorities. Those identified as gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, kothi and hijra; experience various forms of discrimination within the society and the health system. Due to the dominance of heteronormous sexual relations as the only form of normal acceptable relations within the society, individuals who are identified as having same-sex sexual preferences are ridiculed and ostracized by their own family and are left with very limited support structures and networks of community that provide the conditions of care and support. Their needs and concerns are excluded from various health policies and programs.

MARGINALIZATION IN SCHEDULE TRIBES: Since in this project we have to give special reference to the marginalization of scheduled tribes, therefore we are discussing the marginalization of STs in a more elaborative way. The Scheduled Tribes like the Scheduled Castes face structural discrimination within Indian society. Unlike the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are a product of marginalization based on ethnicity. There are approximately two hundred million tribal people in the entire globe, which means about four percent of the global population. In India, the Scheduled Tribes population is around 84.3 million and is considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Their percentages in the population and numbers, however, vary from State to State, 50% of India's tribal population is concentrated in the North-eastern region of the country, who are, geographically and culturally, are at widely different stages of social as well as their economic development is concerned and their problems too differ from area to area within their own groups. From the historical point of view, they have been subjected to the worst type of societal exploitation. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest, and water. They constitute a large proportion of agricultural laborers, casual laborers, plantation laborers, industrial laborers etc. This has resulted in poverty among them, low levels of education, poor health and reduced access to healthcare services. They belong to the poorest strata of the society and have severe health problems. They are less likely to afford and get access to healthcare services when required. They are practically deprived of many civic facilities and isolated from the modern civilized way of living since so many centuries. The health outcomes among the Scheduled Tribes are very poor even as compared to the Scheduled Castes. The Infant Mortality Rate among Scheduled Castes is 83 per 1000 live births while it is 84.2 per 1000 per live births among the Scheduled Tribes. Among the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes the most vulnerable are women, children, aged, those living with HIV/AIDS, mental illness and disability. These groups face severe forms of discrimination that denies them access to treatment and prevents them from achieving a better health status. Gender-based violence and domestic violence is high among women in general in India. Girl child and women from the marginalized groups are more vulnerable to violence. The dropout and illiteracy rates among them are high. Early marriage, trafficking, forced prostitution and other forms of exploitation are also reportedly high among them. In situations of caste conflict, women from marginalized groups face sexual violence from men of upper caste i.e., rape and other forms of

mental torture and humiliation. Nevertheless, the Constitution of India has made definite provisions for the welfare and uplift of the tribal people throughout the country. And the greatest challenge that the Government of India has been facing since Independence, till today is the proper provision of social justice to the scheduled tribe population, besides its rigorous efforts in implementing the new policy of tribal development and integration was initiated throughout the country.

GARO – THE SCHEDULED TRIBE FOUND IN NORTH-EAST INDIA Objectives

In this section, an attempt is made in this project to study the socio-cultural, economic and educational status of Garo's Tribes in Amingokgre village, Tura District of Meghalaya State through full remuneration as well as applying the qualitative research method to reach the depth of their problems.

Historical Background

The early history highlights that the Garo's are descended from their four fathers in a song Tibetgori, who came eastward from the Himalayas and reached Gondul Ghat where they made a brief halt and then traveled to Sadiya from where they trekked into the North bank of Brahmaputra and reached Amingnaon. However, due to the insecurity of life again they crossed the Brahmaputra River and came to reside at Kamakhya, and settled for five generations until the Koches came to invade the Garo Kingdom, and forced them to migrate towards westward Garo outer hills, and later on penetrated the interior hills of their present abode. Further when we critically examined the history of Garos indicated that has been a period marked by persistent of internal warfare and many blood feuds seem to have occurred between the families, villages and neighboring chiefs of Nokmas for their very survival itself. Never the less, the contact between the Garos tribes and the British started towards the close of the 18th Century, only after the British East India Company has secured the Diwani Bengal from the Mughal Emperor.

Present Status

The Garos are mainly distributed over the Kamrup, Goalpara and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam, Garo Hills in Meghalaya, and substantial numbers, about 200,000 are found in greater Mymensingh (Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpore, and Netrakona) and Gazipur, Rangpur, Sunamgonj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar district of Bangladesh. It is estimated that total Garo population in India and Bangladesh together were about 2 million in 2001. Garos are also found scattered in the state of Tripura. The recorded Garo population was around 6,000 in 1971. In a recent survey conducted by the newly revived Tripura Garo Union revealed that the numbers of Garos have increased to about 15000, spreading to all the four districts of Tripura. Garos also form a minority in Cooch, Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, and Dinajpur of West Bengal. As well as in Nagaland, the present generation of Garos forming minority does not speak the ethnic language anymore. Garos are mainly Christians although there are some rural pockets where the traditional animist religion and traditions are still followed. Garo language has different sub-languages, Viz- Abeng, Matabeng, Atong, Megam, Matchi, Dual [Matchi-Dual] Ruga, Chibok, Chisak, Gara, Ganching [Gara-Ganching] Awe etc. In Bangladesh, Abeng is the usual dialect, but Achik is used more in India. The Garo language has some similarities with Boro-Kachari, Rava, Dimasa and Kok-Borok languages.

Study Area Profile

The West

Garo district lies in the western part of the State. The Meghalaya means the 'abode of clouds' which receive the highest rainfalls in the world i.e. (Cherrapunjee). The district headquarters of West Garo Hills is Tura, being the second largest town in the state after Shillong. The total geographical area got stretched into 3,714 Sq. Km. With three sub-division and eight blocks. However, the surface is mostly hill with bit plains fringing the northwest and the southwest borders, which brings the monsoon to this hilly district. The average rainfall is 330 cm. As far as transport facilities are concerned the district is well connected by road, air, and river i.e. within and outside the district. Amingokgre, the study village, located at the distance of 47 Km, from the district headquarter Tura. The total number of households were 32 respectively count in the sex wise distribution indicates that there are 82 males and 75 females and the total population of 157 only. However, out of 32 households, 17 were practicing Christianity, as their religion and rest of the 15 households are nonChristians locally known as 'Songsreks'. As far as basic amenities are concerned the village lacks behind logistically. Having only a way to reach from Tura to village by 1.5 km. a kutchra road that is also in the rainy season becomes difficult for accessible for vehicles. Moreover, the village is not electrified so far, and the major source of drinking water is from streams and wells which totally dry up in the month of October to March. Apart from own activity, there is absolutely no second source of livelihood for the villagers.

Jhum Cultivation

Shifting cultivation, commonly known by many names in this part of the world as Swidden agriculture, slash and burn agriculture,

and Jhum agriculture. Jhum has been described as an agricultural concept which has a unique feature in it the rotation of fields rather than the conventional system of crops i.e. after every two or four years. Moreover, the land is abandoned hence the cultivators were shifted now and then to another new field for clearing, leaving the present field for natural reoccupation for its next turn to come. However, the tribal people who are involved in this type of agricultural practice are called as 'Jhumiyas'. Nevertheless 86% of the populations living in the hills are dependent on shifting cultivation. Therefore, 100 of tribal/ethnic, minority population inhabiting the North East hills due to their very intimately connected with the practice of Jhum cultivation since time immemorial. Which not only highlights their traditional lifestyle their cultural beliefs and emotional bindings toward their motherland but also indicates that how homogeneous group they are by nature. Due to the new development in the economic sector, the concentration of economic power started taking place in many ways, firstly the resources owned by the community gradually passes into private ownership and secondly, land as a productive asset began to concentrate in a fewer hands which led to the decrease in the percentage of cultivators and increase of agricultural laborers. Traditionally, rice being the staple crop grown in the region and almost 70% of the total area used under paddy cultivation customary they are reluctant to go for commercial crops such as HYVFG (High Yielding Variety Food Grains) other than the rice, which fetch them little extra money. However, an attempt was made to analyze the through the FGA's and it was observed that they are reluctant to change because firstly these people are not so ambitious by nature, which make them happy in a hand to mouth earning system, secondly they have a strong(son of the soil) belief to be with nature, closely attached with their place of origin, last but not the least related reason was observed i.e. there is a strong correlated between their lathering attitude and a huge (90 percent) financial assistance received from the Central Government. Educational Status of Garo's – Education is a key strategy for bringing about the changes necessary to ensure socio, cultural, economic development as well as environmental protection in terms of society's perspective. Many research studies in recent times have made a strong case for more investment in basic education considering the fact that majority of the world's poorest people being illiterates and those children not attending school live in rural areas. Hence, the Government of India flagships the Universal Education Policy, considering the importance of education for rural people, as a crucial step to achieve human goals. In order to know the educational level among the Garos tribe full enumeration of the village was done and it was found that only seven people were studied up to secondary level, twelve were up to middle and eleven of them were up to the primary, were as remaining sixty-six were illiterate. However, the factors responsible for high illiteracy, late school enrolment, and the prevalence of high dropouts rates and the lack of interest in modern education and reasons are as follows: Large numbers of villages in this region are yet to be provided schooling facilities. • Majority of the teachers in this region are untrained. • Lack of efficiency from the system side. • Lack of civic amenities in the school building (Classrooms, drinking water). • The striking feature is the school timing only 3 hours i.e. 7.00 A.M. to 10.00 A.M. • Parent cited the reason not enrolling their younger siblings unless until they grow old to • manage independently. Socio-Cultural Status – Unlike numerous other tribes in India who practice their own good old traditional culture till today in their day-to-day life, the Garoe were no different from those. The tribes had been accustomed to the modern formal education system, which successfully complemented them in the arts of material and non-material cultural life to be with the mainstream of India. It was gathered from their opinion i.e. basically these tribes love to be with nature, isolated themselves from the crowd and prefer to be autonomous. Moreover, because of their arrogant nature, they feel reluctant to obey anyone's orders rather prefer to be like a free bird. Customary, Garos had a system called 'Nokpante' means bachelors dormitory. It is a place where veteran men instructed youngsters in a range of competencies pertaining to agriculture hunting, medicine house building carving of wood for artistic and utilization purposes, social properties and the subtler points of religion and rituals. However, it is true that socio-economic realities in these hills have undergone several changes and host of new aims and skills can be inculcated only by getting modern education which is pre-requisite for survival every human being in today's digital society. Culturally, all the young boys and girls must stay in the bachelor dormitories to learn the tricks of Grihast Ashrama, above all not only they have a tradition of selecting their life partners and later they

inform their respective parents about their love affairs. In return, both sides parents, usually women keep track of their children's dating proudly agree to arrange their wedding on a condition that both should prove to be capable of becoming father and mother. As far as religious belief is concerned these tribal people hardly had any faith in religion rather it was interesting to know that they were nastik. Normally, this tribe is a homogeneous by nature that reflects in their day-to-day business by practicing awareness about the outer world. Instead of Panchayati Raj each village had a council, headed by the Mukhiya called 'Nokma' who usually perform the inaugural rituals of cultivation by cutting a tree in the field and prefer to saw the dream till three nights. If Nokma see a bad dream it means to leave the current field and search for new fields for cultivation. The other important finding was Garo's do not have the gender bias among them, but continuing their tradition hunting in general and headhunting, in particular, exhibiting their very character now and then to prove their manliness. The common and regular festivals are those connected with agricultural operations. Greatest among Garo festivals is the Wangala, usually celebrated in October or November, is thanksgiving after harvest in which Saljong, the God who provides mankind with Nature's bounties and ensures their prosperity, is honored. Other festivals are Gal•mak Doa, Agalmaka, etc. Group songs may include Kudare sala, Hoa ringa, Injoka, Kore doka, Ajea, Doroa, Nanggorere goserong, Dim dim chong dading chong, Serejing, Boel sala etc. Dance forms are Ajema Roa, Mi Sua, Chambil Moa, Dokru Sua, Chame mikkang nia, Kambe Toa, Gaewang Roa, Napsepgrika and many others. NGOs working for their welfare in this area – According to my research and findings, there are no such registered NGOs working the upliftment and welfare of this scheduled tribe in Amingokgre village, Tura District of Meghalaya State. Mostly Garos are dependent on Governmental aids, schemes and welfare plans. The government also has not been fully devoted for their welfare; their plans have proved to be insufficient to these tribal people. Suggestion & Recommendation – Studying the above-collected status of Garo tribe in Amingokgre village, Tura District of Meghalaya State, it suggests to me that lack of education facility and awareness is the foremost problem for the Garos. Large numbers of villages in this region are yet to be provided schooling facilities. Trained teachers should be employed, civic amenities like drinking water, school building, etc should be provided. Parents should be encouraged to send their children to school even at very primary ages. Secondly, there should be a transition from shifting cultivation to systems of cultivation, which are more in tune with modern economic, environmental and demographic realities, which is smoother and less painful. Even those who have given it up still live with its cultural rituals and technical legacies. The transition from 'Jhuming' (or 'bewal' or 'podu' as it is known in various regions) to other patterns has been very traumatic for these communities. However, the observations made during the study was the Jhum-Cultivation System does has the stronghold on the socio-cultural, economic and educational status of Garo' strive till today and this vicious cyclic system enabling them to access the modernly available opportunity as well as proper utilization of them. Thirdly, there should be a proper governmental body, like, Panchayati Raj to govern the village for the smooth and proper functioning of the administration in the village. Thus, the need of the day is to, well equipped the tribes in terms of basic education i.e., awareness + knowledge = better utilization which is a pre-requisite for building up a self-secure individual who not only actively participates in community development but also in the development of the whole globe, as his village. CONCLUSION The pertinent question therefore is where do the marginalized groups stand today? Though there has been some improvement in certain spheres and despite some positive changes, the standard of living for the marginalized communities has not improved. Therefore, what Minimum needs to be done? Improved Access to Agricultural Land The reasons for the high incidences of poverty and deprivation among the marginalized social groups are to be found in their continuing lack of access to income-earning capital assets (agricultural land and non-land assets), heavy dependence on wage employment, high unemployment, low education, and other factors. Therefore, there is a need to focus on policies to improve the ownership of income-earning capital assets (agriculture land, and non-land assets), employment, human resource & health situation, and prevention of discrimination to ensure fair participation of the marginalized community in the private and the public sectors. Active Role of the State in Planning It is necessary to recognize that for the vast majority of the discriminated groups, State intervention is crucial and necessary. Similarly, the use of economic and social planning as an

instrument of planned development is equally necessary. Thus, planned State intervention to ensure fair access and participation in social and economic development in the country is necessary.

Improved Access to CapitalThe poverty level among the SC and ST cultivators is 30% and 40% respectively, which is much higher compared with non-scheduled cultivators (18%). Similarly, the poverty incidences of those in business are very high 33% for SC and 41% for ST compared with only 21% among non-scheduled businesses. The viability and productivity of self-employed households need to be improved by providing adequate capital, information, technology, and access to markets. It is a pity that though the STs do own some land, they lack the relevant technological inputs to improve the productivity of their agriculture.

Improved Employment in Public and Private SectorsThere is a need to review and strengthen employment guarantee schemes both in rural and urban areas, particularly in drought-prone and poverty-ridden areas. Rural infrastructure and other productive capital assets can be generated through large-scale employment programmes. This will serve the dual purpose of reducing poverty and ensuring economic growth through improvement in the stock of capital assets and infrastructure.

Education and Human Resource DevelopmentFirstly, lower literacy/level of education and the continued discrimination of SC/STs in educational institutions pose a major problem. The government should take a second look at the Education Policy and develop major programmes for strengthening the public education system in villages and cities on a much larger scale than today. There is a necessity to reallocate government resources for education and vocational training. For millions of poor students located in rural areas, loan schemes do not work. We should develop an affordable, uniform and better quality public education system up to the university level. The public education system is our strength and needs to be further strengthened. Promotion of such private education systems that creates inequality and hierarchy should be discouraged.

Food Security ProgramsThe public distribution system should also be revived and strengthened. In distributing Fair Price Shops in villages, priority should be given to the SC/ST female and male groups, as a number of studies have pointed out that they are discriminated upon in the Public Distribution System and in Mid-day Meal schemes.

Public Health SystemThe public health system in rural areas has also been by and large neglected. Therefore, the primary health system for rural areas and public health system in urban areas must be revived and more funds should be allocated for the same.

Untouchability and DiscriminationThe practice of untouchability and a large number of atrocities inflicted on Dalits continue even today mainly because of hidden prejudices and neglect on the part of officials responsible for the implementation of Special Legislations; i.e. the Protection of Civil Rights Act (PCRA) and the Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA). The Government should make a meaningful intervention in this regard so as to mitigate the sufferings of Dalits due to the practice of untouchability and atrocities inflicted upon them and should also treat this matter on a priority basis to ensure that the officials and the civil society at large are sensitized on this issue