

Breaking the Oppression of India's Dalits

By CÉSAR CHELALA

One can fight oppression with violence or one can fight oppression with education. Hema Konsotia, a 32-year-old Indian woman, has chosen the latter. She is helping to change a situation affecting an estimated 165 million Indian Dalits. Also known as "untouchables," they are a mixed population of numerous caste groups all over South Asia. Although the caste system has been abolished under the Indian Constitution, there is still widespread discrimination and prejudice against Dalits, particularly women.

Dalits are frequently denied such basic rights as education, housing, property, freedom of religion, choice of employment, and fair treatment before the law. This situation led Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to draw parallels between "untouchability" and apartheid in 2006. As a result of discrimination, Dalits are denied full participation in Hindu social and political life.



SEEKING RELIEF: Activists of The National Confederation of Dalits (untouchables) Organizations carry their belongings during a protest New Delhi on Feb. 23, 2009.

Prakash Singh/AP/GETTY IMAGES

In rural India, where caste origins are more apparent and Dalits often remain excluded from local religious activities, many upper caste members believe that Dalits will pollute the temples if they go into them.

Every 20 minutes a crime is committed against Dalits, according to a 2005 government report. Although distressing in itself, this figure probably represents a fraction of all crimes against Dalits, since most of them remain unreported for fear of reprisals from the police or from member of the upper castes.

For several years now, Hema Konsotia has been working to change that situation. She is a union activist and college graduate, leader of Delhi's sewage workers and their wives. For the last 10 years she has been working to empower them and make them aware of their rights while improving their education through mobile education centers she created in Delhi.

A woman of strong character (when a worker was repeatedly disrespectful to her she held him by his collar and slapped him in the face) she has the unwavering support of her mother, who had been through an abusive marriage herself. "My mother is my secret guru," she told a reporter. Hema is determined that Dalits, particularly women, will not suffer what women of previous generations did.

And they certainly need her help since a situation of centuries of discrimination has affected theirs and their children's health and quality of life. For most Dalits, good health care is unaffordable and inaccessible, and generally their experience of health care is limited to emergency care.

The maternal mortality rate is a reflection of accessibility and quality of health services. Prenatal and neonatal care is extremely limited. As a result, complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age. Because most Dalit women are poor, their health status is usually worse than statistics suggest.

The maternal mortality rate is 560 deaths per 100,000 live births (that same rate for industrialized countries is 13 per 100,000.) But for every woman who dies during pregnancy and childbirth, approximately 20 more suffer injuries, infections, and disabilities that may seriously affect their health. Anemia, which is frequent among poor women, predisposes women to sepsis and hemorrhage during delivery.

Child statistics are equally distressing, since 56 children per 1,000 who are born alive die before reaching age 5, a rate that compares with 5 children per 1,000 in industrialized countries. In addition, both women and children, particularly among the poor, experience an alarming rate of physical and sexual abuse.

In January of 2007, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women concluded that Dalit women in India suffer from "deeply rooted structural discrimination." Proud and determined, Hema Konsotia's work with Delhi's poor has already made a difference.

César Chelala is an international public health consultant and a co-winner of an Overseas Press Club of America award for an article on human rights.

On Probation: The Release of Political Prisoners in Cuba

By GABRIEL C. SALVIA

Following a meeting on July 7 of the Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos and Cardinal Ortega of the Cuban Catholic Church with Cuban President Raúl Castro, the Catholic Church announced the Cuban government will set free 52 political prisoners. The prisoners had been detained during the repressive crackdown known as the "Cuban Black Spring" in March 2003, processed through summary trials, and most of them sentenced to around 20 years in prison.

Immediately one can listen to the optimistic readings on political changes in Cuba, as if ignoring the repressive regime's skill at holding power for more than half a century. However, so long as human rights are considered a crime, nothing will change in that country and those who are being released can be sent back to prison anytime.

The judicial-political regime in Cuba violates most of the basic guarantees established in all the international instruments approved over the last decades, and that currently are part of the international law on human rights. In this sense, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2006 recommended the government of Cuba "order the immediate and unconditional release of all the victims nullifying the sentences against them, for being based in laws that impose illegitimate restrictions to their human rights."

More recently, in November 2009, a categorical report by Human Rights Watch stated: "Raúl Castro's government has used draconian laws and sham trials to incarcerate scores more who have dared to exercise their fundamental freedoms. Raúl Castro's government has relied in particular on a provision of the Cuban Criminal Code that allows the state to imprison individuals before they have committed a crime, on the suspicion that they might commit an offense in the future."

"This 'dangerousness' provision is overtly political, defining as 'dangerous' any behavior that contradicts socialist norms. The most Orwellian of Cuba's laws, it captures the essence of the Cuban government's repressive mindset, which views anyone who acts out of step with the government as a potential threat and thus worthy of punishment. ... The 'dangerous' activities in these cases have included handing out copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, staging peaceful marches, writing news articles critical of the government, and attempting to organize independent unions."

In this sense, the important matter in terms of political opening in Cuba was set in the Declaration "The Exercise of Rights Is No Crime," signed by 75 judicial, political, and social figures from Latin America, among them Julio César Strassera, Patrio Aylwin, Graciela Fernández Meijide, Guillermo O'Donnell, Daniel Sabsay, Vicente Palermo

and Emilio De Ipola: "We agree that the region should normalize its relations with Cuba, but for that the government of the Castro brothers must harmonize its internal rules eliminating the restrictions to the most elemental human rights. ... It is time for Latin America to stand side by side with Cuban democrats and demand the regime of the Castro brothers begin a political opening guaranteeing very elemental rights such as the freedom of association and speech, something that would allow the release of many political prisoners for the principle of the validity of the mildest law."

That is to say, instead of limiting to ask the freedom of political prisoners—something praiseworthy—democratic governments who want to positively influence the political opening in Cuba, must require the Cuban government first introduce changes in its constitution and criminal code, and erase special laws like number 88, thus recognizing fundamental freedoms.

If the exercise of rights continues to be criminalized in Cuba, no political change can be expected on the island and even less a democratic transition, so there is no profound reason for the European Union to modify its common position adopted in 1996.

Gabriel C. Salvia is chairman of the Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL).

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Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party

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On the Tyranny of the Chinese Communist Party

News Reporting: On Oct. 15, 2004, Hong Kong-based Wenweipao newspaper reported that China's twentieth satellite returned to earth, falling on and destroying the house of Huo Jiyu in Penglai Township, located in Dayin County, Sichuan Province.

The report quoted Dayin County government office director Ai Yuqing saying that the "black lump" was confirmed to be the satellite. Ai was himself the on-site deputy director of the satellite recovery project.

However, Xinhua News only reported the time of the satellite's recovery, emphasizing that this was the 20th scientific and technical experimental satellite recovered by China.

Xinhua News did not mention a word about the satellite destroying a house. This is a typical example of the Chinese news media's consistent practice of reporting only the good news and covering up the bad news, as instructed by the Party.

Lies and slander published by newspapers and broadcast on television have greatly assisted the execution of the CCP's policies in all past political movements. The Party's

command would be instantly executed by the media in the country.

When the Party wanted to start an Anti-Rightist Movement, media all over China reported with one voice the crimes of rightists. When the Party wanted to set up the people's communes, every newspaper in the nation started to praise the superiority of people's communes.

Within the first month of the persecution of Falun Gong, all television and radio stations slandered Falun Gong repeatedly in their prime time broadcasting in order to brainwash people.

Since then, Jiang Zemin [the paramount leader of China in 2004] has utilized all media repeatedly to fabricate and spread lies and slander about Falun Gong. This includes the effort to incite nationwide hatred against Falun Gong by reporting false news about Falun Gong practitioners' committing murder and suicide.

An example of such false reporting is the staged Tiananmen self-immolation incident, which was criticized by the NGO International Educational Development as a government-staged action to deceive people. In the past five years, no mainland Chinese newspaper or TV station has reported the truth about Falun Gong.

Chinese people are used to the false news reports. A senior reporter of Xinhua News Agency once said, "How could you trust a Xinhua report?"

People have even described Chinese news agencies as the Party's

dog. A folk song has it: "It is a dog raised by the Party, guarding the Party's gate. It would bite anyone the Party wants it to bite, and bite however many times the Party wants it to."

Education: In China, education became another tool used to control people. The original purpose of education was to develop intellectuals to have both knowledge and correct judgment.

Knowledge refers to the understanding of information, data, and historical events; judgment refers to the process of analyzing, investigating, critiquing, and reproducing such knowledge—a process of developing an independent mind.

Those who have knowledge without proper judgment are referred to as bookworms, not true intellectuals with a social conscience. This is why in Chinese history it is the intellectuals with righteous judgment, not those having merely knowledge, who have been highly respected.

Under the CCP's control, however, China is filled with intellectuals who have knowledge but not judgment, or who dare not exercise judgment. Education in schools focused on teaching students not to do things that the Party did not want them to do.

In recent years, all schools started to teach politics and CCP history with unified textbooks. The teachers did not believe the content of the text, yet they were forced by the Party discipline to teach it against their wills. The students did not

believe the text or their teachers, yet they had to remember everything in the text in order to pass the exams.

Recently, questions about Falun Gong were included in term and entrance exams for colleges and high schools. Students who do not know the standard answers do not get high scores and thus cannot enter good colleges or high schools. If a student dares to speak the truth, he will be expelled from school immediately and lose any chance of formal education.

In the public education system, due to the influence of the newspapers and government documents, many well-known sayings or phrases have been spread as truth, such as Mao's quotation "We should support whatever the enemy opposes and oppose whatever the enemy supports."

The negative effect is widespread: it has poisoned people's hearts, supplanting benevolence and destroying the moral principle of living in peace and harmony.

In 2004, the China Information Center analyzed a survey done by the China Sina Net, and the results show that 82.6 percent of Chinese youth agreed that one can abuse women, children, and prisoners during a war.

This result is shocking. But it reflects the Chinese people's mindset, and especially that of the younger generation, who lack a basic understanding of either the traditional cultural concept of benevolent rule or the notion of universal humanity.

QUITTING THE CCP



Inspired by the
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76,440,783

Chinese people have announced their intentions to quit the Chinese Communist Party and its affiliated organizations on a special Web site established by The Epoch Times. Many others, unable to break through the Chinese Internet blockade, have posted their withdrawal statements on poles or buildings. Others have written them on Chinese currency. Read recent statements of Chinese quitting the Party, the latest news on the "Nine Commentaries," and more at <http://www.NineCommentaries.com>

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