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Necropolitics and the Racialised Management of Death: A Comparative Study of Black Lives in the U.S. and the Depressed Classes in India

Manisha

Introduction

In today's world, not everyone is treated same. Some lives are valued more than the others. Some people's lives are more protected while others are ignored and exposed to social neglect. In countries like United States and India, Black people and Depressed face more violence, social exclusion and even early deaths. This is not just coincidence but happens again and again which shows that something is wrong in the system itself. This article explains that society often treats some lives as less important and disposable than others. Their suffering and pain get generalised over than time and people normalise it. It is not that their lives have no value but due to decades of normalised behaviour their value seems less important than others. Because of this, their pain is often ignored and this shows how unfair and unequal the system really is.

Taking inspiration from Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, this article intends to show how race and caste are used by governments and societies to decide whose lives deserve care and whose suffering gets overlooked. Instead of seeing violence against Black and depressed people as rare or accidental, I argue that it's part of a bigger system that keeps some lives always at risk.

By reorienting the analytical focus from the control of life to the management of death, necropolitics expands on Michel Foucault's

concept of biopolitics. Mbembe emphasizes that contemporary states increasingly govern by subjecting specific populations to conditions of death rather than ensuring their well-being, and he defines necropolitics as the exercise of sovereignty through the power to dictate who may live and who must die. Thus, necropolitical structures such as removal of protection, abandonment, and neglect in addition to direct killing govern the lives of both Black and depressed, making survival itself uncertain and dependent.

Historical Roots of Disposability: Slavery and Caste

Slavery, segregation, and racial capitalism have all historically shaped Blackness in the US by portraying Black bodies as disposable and exploitable. Orlando Patterson's concept of "social death" describes how enslaved Africans were stripped of kinship, legal recognition, and political personhood, rendering them alive yet socially annihilated. Although formal slavery has ended, scholars argue that its afterlives persist in the contemporary institutions such as policing, prisons, and labour markets. Mass incarceration, police brutality, and legal impunity are some of the major ways that the criminal justice system in particular, contributes to the disposable nature of Black lives.

Lethal state violence in the US is racially motivated, as empirical evidence repeatedly shows. Multiple national datasets on police use of deadly force show that Black Americans are killed by police at disproportionately higher rates than white Americans, even when controlling for population size and crime rates. In 2024, U.S. police killed at least 1,173 people to death, showing that lethal encounters remain high nationwide. Of those 1,173 people shot, 248 were Black Americans, despite Black people being a minority of the population. "Between 2015 and 2024, Black Americans experienced a fatal police shooting rate (~6.1 per million) more than twice that of white American

(~2.4 per million)" The way that these deaths are frequently presented as regrettable but essential results of law enforcement shows how Black death has become accepted in popular culture.

Legal systems that often-let police officers off their actions make this normalisation even stronger. Research on grand jury verdicts and prosecutorial conduct indicates that officers involved in the killing of Black civilians are rarely indicted or convicted, fostering a culture of immunity that underscores the disposability of Black lives. When the state does not punish deadly violence against Black people, it is not simply an error but a deliberate decision which revels that about whose lives the government cares more and whose deaths it is willing to ignore.

In addition to direct police brutality, structural factors that reduce life expectancy and heighten vulnerability to death also contribute to Black disposability. Black populations in the United States have consistently higher rates of chronic illness, infant mortality, maternal mortality, and lower life expectancy than white populations, according to the public health data. These outcomes are caused by systemic neglect, environmental racism, unequal access to healthcare, and economic deprivation rather than being biologically inevitable. Thus, slow violence – where death is cumulative rather than immediate – is how necropolitics functions.

The historical logic of the caste system which had organized the society through strict norms of purity and pollution has made Dalit lives "disposable". As B.R. Ambedkar argued, "caste is not merely a division of labour, but a division of labourers" describing how hierarchy is socially created rather than natural. This system rejected Dalits from the moral and social order reducing them to degraded and disadvantageous roles. Such positioning made exclusion normal and

created situations in which violence and neglect was viewed as ordinary rather than extraordinary. In this sense caste is a structure what Achille Mbembe calls "death worlds… in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead".

Caste based disposability has historically worked through structured decline of rights and acceptance. Dalits were denied ownership of land, access to education and use of public resources, thus consolidating their dependence and risk. Gopal Guru and Gail Omvedt argue that such exclusion was not random but fundamentally linked to social and political structures "caste hierarchy is maintained through both material deprivation and ideological control". Such exclusion created a condition similar to what Orlando Patterson describes as "social death, whereby individuals are denied full social personhood". In such a system, Dalit lives were not just minimal but structurally worthless.

The continued existence of caste-based occupations is another example of the material application of disposability. Historically many Dalits have been forced to do dangerous and discriminatory work like sanitation work and manual scavenging. Such forms of labour are socially less valued putting workers at the risk of disease, injury, and early death. As Anand Teltumbde has written "Caste continues to reproduce itself through economic structures that keep Dalits confined to the most degrading forms of labour". Similarly Suraj Yengde observes that "caste is not a relic of the past but a living system shaping access to dignity, labour and life chances". These conditions show how caste distributes risk unevenly, making some populations more exposed to harm and early death.

Caste based disposability is also sustained through institutional

indifference and normalization of violence. Dalits are often the victims of violence which is ignored or dismissed, leading to their invisibility in legal and public discourse. Judith Butler explains that "specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living" meaning that recognition itself is not equally distributed. This lack of mention allows systems of power to allow and reproduce violence without accountability. Thus, disposability is not only physical harm but also a lack of social and political recognition.

The historical roots of caste thus reveal a system that produces and maintains disposability through exclusion, exploitation and acceptance of suffering. From Ambedkar's critique of caste to Patterson's idea of social death and Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, it is clear that Dalit clear that Dalit lives have long been defined onto structures that shape their exposure to violence and premature death. These ways of thinking about and experiencing life still exist in today's society, showing that disposability is not only a historical condition but also a present-day reality built into social and political institutions.

Policing, Law, and the Normalisation of Death

The policing and legal systems of both the United States and India show how state power can normalise violence and premature death for marginalized communities. In the United States, police killed at least 1,173 people in 2024, including 248 Black people, showing the routine use of lethal force. Over time, this violence becomes highly racialized since Black American are at a fatal police shooting rate of about 6.1% per million compared to the rate of 2.4 per million for white Americans. These differences shows policing is not neutral but organised by racial hierarchies. As Michelle Alexander states, "mass incarceration functions as a racial caste system" tying policing directly to larger systems of racial control. Similarly, Khalil Gibran Muhammad

shows that "racial narratives of criminality have historically justified surveillance and punishment of Black communities".

Dalits in India face similar patterns of violence though they are often less systematically documented. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, over 50,000 cases of crimes are reported every year showing regular and widespread violence. But these figures likely do not reflect the true scale due to underreporting and organizational challenges. Dalits also face a large proportion of custodial violence and delayed justice adding to their vulnerability in legal systems. As B.R. Ambedkar argues "law and order are the medicine of the body politic, but for Dalits, access to this medicine is uneven". Anand Teltumbde also argues that "caste continues to structure violence and exclusion in contemporary India".

In both the United States and India laws always don't do justice to everyone equally. The issue is usually not that laws do not exist but that they are applied differently depending on race, caste, class and social power. People from marginalized communities often face harsher treatment while those in powerful positions are more likely to get away with it. In the United States laws such as qualified immunity and common argument that police killings were "justified" make it difficult to hold officers accountable. This shows what Achille Mbembe describes as "the power to dictate who may live and who must die". In this sense, law can become a mechanism that preserves unequal relations of power rather than correcting them.

This legal imbalance is closely tied to wider systems of racial control. Achille Mbembe argues that "the power to dictate who may live and who must die". Michelle Alexander also argues that "mass incarceration operates as a racial system, systematically excluding Black communities from full citizenship" Similarly, Khalil Gibran

Muhammad demonstrates that "racialized narratives of criminality have historically justified policing and punishment, shaping legal responses in ways that normalize violence". Together, these ideas show that violence is not only carried out through force, but also through legal systems that allows inequality to continue.

This understanding of law as a device that can be used to legitimate inequality is further strengthened through ethnographic and sociological analysis. Didier Fassin argues that policing is supported by "moral economies that justify unequal treatment, particularly toward marginalized population". Similarly, Ruth Wilson Gilmore links the growth of policing and prisons to broader political economic processes arguing that carceral systems manage surplus populations through containment and control. In this sense the law does not merely fail to prevent violence it actively shapes the conditions under which certain types of violence are acceptable.

There is a gap between the legal structure that protects people from discrimination and their day-to-day experiences. For example, in India we find equality guaranteed under the constitution and the laws that protect Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled tribes from cruelty these laws are not enforced properly. As a result, people are not punished for their crimes often. B.R. Ambedkar had already warned that "political equality cannot succeed without social and economy equality" just having equal rights is not enough if people are not equal in society and economy. He said this back in 1936. This shows that changing laws is not enough is a society where some people are much more powerful than others. Many scholars today agree with him. Anand Teltumbde argues that "caste continues to structure institutional responses to violence, ensuring that justice remains inaccessible for many Dalits". Gail Omvedt further notes that caste system is kept going

by both money and ideas.

There are gaps between what the law says and what actually happens. This creates a situation where people do not do anything about violence or they make it seem like it is not a deal or they just ignore it. As Judith Butler argues "some lives are not recognized as fully grievable"

Global Context: UNCP and the Logic of One-Sided Violence

When we look at what happens to people in the United States and Dalits in India, international datasets and studies on conflict can help us see the bigger picture of violence that is planned and carried out. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program is one of the trusted sources for the kind of information. They keep track of violence including what they call "one-sided violence" which is when governments or groups use force against ordinary people on purpose. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program says this is what happens when states or groups use force against people who are not fighting back. Even though the Uppsala Conflict Data Program does not specifically look at violence based on caste or race their way of analysing things helps us understand why some groups of people are more likely to be hurt by the government or institutions.

Data from the UCDP shows that violence against civilians does not happen by chance, rather it follows clear patterns which are often connected to politics and the way political and social institutions work. The data reveals that Black Americans face a higher risk of harm from the police, and Dalits face more caste-based violence. This is a part of a wider problem and not just about a few separate cases. Certain groups are more at risk of being hurt within systems. The UCDP data demonstrates that violence against civilians follows patterns. These patterns are linked to politics and institutions. The disproportionate exposure of Black Americans to police violence and of Dalits to caste-

based atrocities can be understood as part of a global logic.

Scholars of everyday violence help us understand this issue better. Paul Farmer argues that "structural violence is exerted systematically… by everyone who belongs to a certain social order". Paul Farmer says that structural violence is a system where everyone in a social group plays a part in hurting others. He argues that this happens over time and becomes a part of how institutions work. Similarly, Judith Butler argues that not all lives are equally recognized noting that "some lives are not considered grievable".

The UCDP mostly looks at the situations where there is conflict but we can also use it to understand the kinds of quiet violence that happen in democratic countries. In the United States police killings are a thing and they affect some people more than others. In India people from the caste also known as Dalits often face violence and are treated unfairly. They are also more likely to die in police custody and are often excluded from society. Loïc Wanquant links the "expansion of punitive state practices to the management of marginalised populations arguing that modern governance often combines welfare retrenchment with increased surveillance and punishment". Similarly Ruth Wilson Gilmore shows "how carceral systems function to contain surplus populations, particularly along racial lines".

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Lady Shri Ram College for Women
University of Delhi, New Delhi