

UNHEARD VOICES

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None found suitable : Making reservation disabled?



Gap between goal and reality

While we often witness some positive signs, indicating how caste sensitivities in India are at decline, some occasions make us realize that we still have a long way to go to achieve a social structure based on harmony and social cohesiveness. Of course, it is a painful reality but we have to accept it so that we can move in the right direction. Solutions to any social ill cannot be found unless one accepts the precise nature of illness.

We have published two articles in the current issue, which remind us of reality. One is about a 'None found suitable' practice in the appointments, which are from reserved categories. 'None found suitable', which is better known as NFS, is a big excuse, which defeats the fundamental purpose of reservation. Another article is about non-utilization, under utilization and even diversions of funds, which are specifically meant for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The most serious part of this revelation is that this fund is diverted for populist schemes instead of using it for welfare of deprived classes. This is not merely shocking but poses a serious question mark before the intention of the administration and its political bosses.

We have a number of policies and programmes, which are exclusively meant for Scheduled Caste communities and Scheduled Tribes. In federal structure, both union and state governments have freedom to have their own programmes and policies for the upliftment of deprived classes. However, it is the time to have realistic scrutiny of the implementation of all these programmes. Many times, political parties are tempted to announce such schemes to gain political mileage. Budgets are allocated for such schemes but their desired impact is not seen at the ground level. Eventually, these schemes

turn as ornamental or as token. For example, funds allocated exclusively for post-graduate SC students in Kerala, are not released for two years. These students are heavily dependent on the government's financial assistance. How will they complete education if the government is not keen or sensitive on such issue? It is serious that this is happening in Communist regime, which always exhibits its sympathy and commitment for the deprived people. Similar trend is also seen in Tamil Nadu, where DMK does not miss any opportunity to show its commitment for deprived communities.

Million-dollar question arises: why this apathy towards implementing schemes for deprived classes? Similar reluctance cannot be ruled out in other parts of the country in view of the experience. We need to have a robust fact check exercise on implementation of schemes for deprived classes. This indifferent attitude is a major obstacle in having a harmonious society. We can have some administrative mechanism to address these issues. We can have some pressure groups, which will exert pressure on political leadership as watch dogs. Similarly, beneficiaries, who are obviously from deprived communities, needed to be awakened and educated about such schemes. However, this is not sufficient. We need to look beyond such superficial and cosmetic measures, which are fundamentally related to the mindset or attitude of the people. Political leadership and administrators are not aliens. They do come from the same society from which all of us come. They have all the biases and prejudices like anybody else. It is absolutely the need of the hour to inculcate the principle of social equality as a human value from early childhood. Efforts are needed to be taken in this direction at formal and informal level. It is not merely the

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responsibility of the government but of all the citizens. All the ideas and dreams for a strong nation would be meaningless if the individual of the last layer is not benefitted.

Unfortunately, we have some elements, which have been fuelling imported shallow divisive factors. We need to neglect such elements and encourage those bonds, which have kept us united for centuries despite all the odds. We have experienced that feeling of unity

helps us to keep aside caste sensitivities. Feeling of brotherhood makes us more responsible and sensible to carry out our duties towards our brothers and sisters. This sense of unity and brotherhood is the sustainable solution, which will overcome age old attitude. We have had some pleasant experiences for the past few years, which show that we are ready to welcome new India, where everybody is equal. Let us walk on that path.

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None Found Suitable (NFS) defeating purpose of reservation

To address the issue of None Found Suitable, it is essential to recognize and challenge the colonial legacy that underlies the 'None found suitable' problem. Efforts should be made to decolonize selection committees by promoting inclusivity, diversity, and equal opportunities for all candidates. This includes re-evaluating the evaluation criteria, incorporating multiple perspectives, and recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity.

Pramod Kumar & Deoraj



'None Found Suitable' practice is rooted in colonial history and need to be discontinued. The issue of the 'None found suitable' outcome in selection committees does indeed have a historical context intertwined with colonialism, which aimed to impose feelings of inferiority on Indians. During the colonial era, discriminatory practices and ideologies were prevalent, designed to establish a hierarchy that positioned the colonial powers as superior and the indigenous populations as inferior. Selection committees, influenced by these colonial ideologies, often favoured candidates

who aligned with Eurocentric standards and perspectives. The criteria for suitability were often based on Western educational systems, cultural norms, and social hierarchies, effectively excluding many qualified individuals from diverse backgrounds.

This imposition of inferiority was a deliberate strategy employed by the colonial powers to maintain control and reinforce their dominance. By denying opportunities and perpetuating a narrative of inferiority, the colonizers sought to undermine the confidence, capabilities, and aspirations of the colonized population. Even



though colonial rule has officially ended, its legacy continues to impact various aspects of society, including selection processes. The remnants of this colonial mindset can still be observed in the criteria and biases employed during evaluations, often leading to the exclusion of deserving candidates based on their cultural backgrounds or alternative knowledge systems.

To address this issue, it is essential to recognize and challenge the colonial legacy that underlies the 'None found suitable' problem. Efforts should be made to decolonize selection committees by promoting inclusivity, diversity, and equal opportunities for all candidates. This includes re-evaluating the evaluation criteria, incorporating multiple perspectives, and recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity.

Factors Responsible for the Increase in NFS

The 'None found suitable' problem in selection committees in the educational sector has historical roots that can be traced back to various factors and developments. While it is challenging to pinpoint a single cause, several historical aspects have contributed to this issue. Here are some key factors that have influenced the emergence of the 'None found suitable' problem:

1. Caste and Discrimination: Historically, caste-based discrimination has plagued various aspects of Indian society, including education. The hierarchical caste system often influenced the selection committees, resulting in biased decision-making processes. Discrimination and prejudice against certain castes or marginalized communities have led to qualified candidates being overlooked or excluded, resulting in the 'None found suitable' outcome.

2. Reservation Policies: India has implemented affirmative action policies, known as reservations, to address historical social inequalities. While these policies aim to promote inclusivity and provide opportunities to marginalized communities, they have also faced challenges. In some cases, reservation quotas have been difficult to fill due to inadequate representation of eligible candidates, resulting in the 'None found suitable' situation.

3. Limited Pool of Qualified Candidates: Another factor contributing to the problem is the limited pool of qualified candidates. In certain regions or disciplines, there may be a scarcity of highly qualified individuals with the necessary skills and qualifications. This scarcity can make it challenging for selection committees to find suitable candidates, resulting in the 'None found suitable' outcome.

4. Stringent Selection Criteria: Selection

committees in the educational sector often establish stringent criteria and requirements for positions. While these criteria aim to ensure quality and competence, they may inadvertently narrow down the pool of eligible candidates. As a result, selection committees may struggle to find candidates who meet the desired qualifications, leading to the 'None found suitable' problem.

5. Lack of Standardization and Transparency:


Historically, the selection process in the educational sector has faced issues related to lack of standardization and transparency. Subjective decision-making, favouritism, and lack of clear guidelines can contribute to the 'None found suitable' outcome. Inadequate training and oversight of selection committee members can also impact the fairness and effectiveness of the selection process.

Addressing the historical roots of the 'None found suitable' problem requires comprehensive reforms, including promoting inclusive practices, strengthening the education system, addressing discrimination, enhancing transparency, and providing adequate training to selection committee members. By addressing these historical factors, it is possible to create a more equitable and effective selection process in the educational sector.

'None Found Suitable'. Decision in Selection Committees is Unacceptable

It is important to consider alternative approaches that prioritize the qualifications and potential of candidates. One possible solution could involve refraining from making a 'None Found Suitable' decision if applicants have successfully passed the screening and shortlisting process, have attained good grades from the same institutions, and have taught as ad hoc teachers in the same institution for more than two years. In cases where their performance during the interview falls short, a provisional appointment could be considered. This approach recognizes the valuable experience and qualifications that candidates possess, as demonstrated by their academic achievements and previous teaching roles within the same institution. By considering these factors, it ensures that individuals who have already proven their capabilities are not automatically excluded from the selection process due to a single subpar interview.

A provisional appointment allows for further assessment and observation of the candidate's abilities in a teaching position. During this provisional period, their performance can be closely monitored and evaluated to determine if they are able to meet the required standards. This approach provides an opportunity for



candidates to demonstrate their potential in a practical setting, rather than solely relying on a single interview performance. It is important, however, to establish clear guidelines and criteria for the provisional appointment, ensuring that it is not misused or exploited. Appropriate monitoring and feedback mechanisms should be in place to assess the candidate's progress during the provisional period. Regular evaluations can help determine if they are able to meet the expected standards and contribute effectively to the institution.

Universities and institutions that consistently show a 'Not found suitable' record in their evaluations should face consequences in terms of their NAAC/NIRF rankings. Additionally, the leadership and management of these institutions should also be subject to penalties that impact their promotional opportunities. It is imperative to establish a system where academic institutions are held accountable for their performance and commitment to quality education.

By adopting this approach, selection committees can prioritize the overall qualifications, achievements, and potential of candidates while providing them with an opportunity to prove their abilities through a provisional appointment. This method helps mitigate the risk of overlooking capable individuals due to a single interview outcome and promotes a more inclusive and equitable selection process.

Safeguards need to be Introduced against NFS

Addressing the 'None found suitable' problem in selection committees within the educational sector requires a multi-faceted approach. Here are some strategies that can help mitigate this issue:

1. Review and revise selection Criteria: Evaluate the existing selection criteria to ensure they are relevant, fair, and aligned with the requirements of the position. Consider revising overly stringent or unnecessary qualifications that may restrict the pool of eligible candidates. This will help expand the possibilities for finding suitable candidates.

2. Promote diversity and inclusion: Encourage diversity and inclusion within selection committees themselves. Ensure representation from various backgrounds and perspectives to minimize biases and increase the likelihood of recognizing suitable candidates from different communities and marginalized groups.

3. Sensitize selection committee members: Provide training and sensitization programs to selection committee members. Educate them about unconscious biases, discrimination, and the importance of fairness and inclusivity in the selection process. This can help them recognize and overcome biases that may lead to the exclusion of qualified candidates.

4. Strengthen outreach and recruitment efforts: Implement robust outreach and recruitment strategies to attract a diverse pool of candidates. This includes promoting positions through various channels, engaging with educational institutions, communities, and professional networks, and actively seeking candidates from underrepresented groups. Broadening the candidate pool increases the likelihood of finding suitable individuals.

5. Streamline and standardize the selection process: Establish clear guidelines and procedures for selection committees. Define evaluation criteria, interview processes, and assessment methodologies to ensure consistency, transparency, and fairness. This helps eliminate subjective decision-making and provides a level playing field for all candidates.

6. Regular review and monitoring: Continuously review the effectiveness of the selection process and monitor outcomes. Analyze the reasons behind the 'None found suitable' outcome and identify potential gaps or shortcomings in the process. Regularly assess the progress made in addressing the problem and make necessary adjustments to improve future selection procedures.

7. Support skill development and training: Invest in the professional development and skill enhancement of potential candidates. Provide training programs, mentorship opportunities, and resources that help candidates acquire the required qualifications and competencies for the positions. This can increase the pool of qualified candidates and minimize the occurrence of the 'None found suitable' situation.

8. Enhance collaboration and networking: Foster collaborations between educational institutions, industry professionals, and selection committees. Encourage knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices, and collaborative efforts in identifying and evaluating suitable



candidates. This collaboration can broaden the perspectives of selection committees and lead to more informed decisions.

9. Universities and institutions that consistently show a 'Not found suitable' record in their evaluations should face consequences in terms of their NAAC/NIRF rankings. Additionally, the leadership and management of these institutions should also be subject to penalties that impact their promotional opportunities. It is imperative to establish a system where academic institutions are held accountable for their performance and commitment to quality education. If an institution consistently fails to meet the necessary standards, it reflects a lack of effective leadership and management. As such, it is appropriate to consider reducing their NAAC/NIRF ranking, which serves as a measure of their overall excellence.

10. Furthermore, the leadership and management responsible for the institutions functioning must face penalties that impact their promotional prospects. This approach serves as a strong deterrent, ensuring that those in leadership positions take their responsibilities seriously and actively work towards improving the institution's performance.

By implementing these strategies, it is possible to address the "None found suitable" problem in selection committees within the educational sector. Creating a more inclusive, transparent, and standardized selection process

will help identify and recognize qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds, ensuring a fair and effective recruitment system.

Policy prescription

To address this problem, it is imperative to establish a policy prescription that promotes transparency, accountability, and equal opportunities for all candidates. Here are some key considerations that could be incorporated into such a policy:

1. Structured Evaluation Criteria: Clear and objective evaluation criteria should be established and communicated to all members of the selection committee. This will ensure that the assessment is based on merit, qualifications, and relevant experience, rather than subjective judgments or personal biases.

2. Diversity and Inclusion: The composition of selection committees should reflect the diversity of the candidate pool. It is essential to have members from different backgrounds, disciplines, and perspectives to minimize unconscious biases and ensure fair evaluations.

3. Training and Sensitization: Committee members should receive regular training on unconscious bias, diversity, and inclusive practices. This will enhance their awareness and understanding of potential biases that may affect the decision-making process.

4. Robust Screening Process: Implementing a comprehensive screening process can help identify suitable candidates at the initial stage.



not selected.

This can include an evaluation of qualifications, experience, research contributions, and any other relevant criteria specified for the position.

5. Feedback Mechanism: Establishing a feedback mechanism for candidates who were deemed unsuitable will provide them with valuable insights into their application and interview performance. Constructive feedback can guide them in improving their skills and qualifications for future opportunities.

6. Continuous Review and Improvement: Regular evaluation and review of the selection process are crucial for identifying any systemic issues and making necessary improvements. This can be done through data analysis, surveys, and feedback from both committee members and candidates.

7. To address the 'None Found Suitable' issue in selection committees, it is crucial to establish grievance redressal mechanisms at different levels: institutional, state, and central. These mechanisms will provide a platform for individuals who feel unfairly treated by selection committees to voice their concerns, seek resolution, and ensure a fair and transparent evaluation process.

a. Institutional Level: At the institutional level, it is essential to create an internal grievance redressal mechanism. This could involve setting up a committee or designated officer responsible for handling complaints related to selection processes. The mechanism should ensure confidentiality, impartiality, and prompt resolution of grievances raised by candidates who believe they were wrongly deemed 'Not found suitable'.

b. State Level: To address systemic issues and ensure consistency across institutions within a state, a state-level grievance redressal mechanism can be established. This body should be independent and have the authority to investigate complaints related to selection processes. It should also have the power

to recommend corrective actions and hold institutions accountable for any unfair practices.

c. Central Level: At the central level, a national-level grievance redressal mechanism can be established to oversee and monitor the selection processes of various institutions across the country. This central body should have the capacity to handle complaints that have not been resolved at the institutional or state level. It can provide guidance, conduct investigations, and recommend necessary reforms to ensure a fair and equitable selection process.

d. These grievance redressal mechanisms should have clearly defined procedures, timelines for resolution, and mechanisms for feedback and transparency. They should also provide protection against victimization or retaliation for individuals raising complaints. Regular reporting and monitoring of complaints and their outcomes should be conducted to identify patterns of unfair practices and implement corrective measures.

e. Additionally, awareness campaigns and training programs can be organized to educate candidates, committee members, and administrators about the grievance redressal mechanisms and the importance of fair evaluation processes. This will empower individuals to come forward and report any instances of bias or unfair treatment.

f. By establishing institutional, state, and central level grievance redressal mechanisms, we can create a more accountable and transparent selection process. This will help address the 'None Found Suitable' problem by providing an avenue for individuals to seek justice, ensuring that decisions are based on merit and eliminating discriminatory practices.

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Funds allotted for deprived communities remain unutilized

SC/ST WELFARE



The Union government allocates crores of rupees through various schemes meant for the upliftment of SC and ST communities. This fund has the potential to change the lives of deprived communities. Shockingly, it has been found that these funds, meant for the welfare of SC and ST communities, are not utilized. In fact, funds are diverted to some other general populist schemes. This defeats the purpose, and the deprived communities remain more marginalized.

Prakash Raj

What is the SCSP central scheme?


In 1975, the Government of India established the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) intending to promote the development of Adivasis, also known as the Scheduled Tribes. Subsequently, the establishment of the Special Component Plan (SCP) took place with the specific objective of fostering the advancement of Scheduled Castes. Later, it was renamed as Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP). The fund's objective is to give financial resources for initiatives targeted at advancing SC/ST communities. It aims to develop infrastructure, skill sets, and income-generating initiatives for the marginalized SC/ST community. Given the necessity for schemes for SCSPs to be devised per the economic activities and local occupations accessible within the states, the Union territories and states have been granted unrestricted autonomy in allocating the funds they deem most suitable, provided that it remains consistent with the established guidelines. The vision of the SCSP initiative is to empower members of the marginalized community

through infrastructure and development programmes that are equivalent to the economic standards of forward castes.

Nevertheless, there have been frequent claims of misappropriation and diversion of cash for non-specific uses. State administrations in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu have recently been accused of misappropriating funds intended for the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) by redirecting them towards programmes designed for the general population. This article attempts to explore how the South Indian states, known for their social justice policies in the country, themselves dilute the SC/ST Funds. Moreover, the debate and discussion instigated on Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP) is minimal as the political consciousness and power wielding of the Dalits and Tribals are less compared to any other castes.

Dilution of Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan in Tamil Nadu

Since the fiscal year 1980-1981, the scheduled



caste Sub-Plan has been implemented in Tamil Nadu. But the plight of Adi Dravidar (SC/ST people) people is pathetic; it is not up to the same level as other communities in terms of their social, economic, and educational status. According to an RTI filed by social activist Karthick, the Tamil Nadu government revealed that Rs.5,318 crores of funds had not been utilized for the scheduled caste Sub-Plan for the last six years from 2017-2022. Despite the welfare programmes being implemented through 20 departments, Rs.2,418 crore was not utilized in the financial year 2021-22, which is outrageous.

The dwellings of the SC/ST communities were devoid of essential facilities such as roads and toilets, while the dormitories managed by the Adi Dravidar Welfare agencies for the students were in dire need of infrastructure development. The disbursement of scholarships for SC/ST students was inadequate, and schools catering to these populations suffered from a shortage of skilled teachers. The Tamil Nadu State BJP President Annamalai said, "It is shocking to learn about the lethargic attitude of the Dravidian government. Moreover, he stated that the present government boasts about the Dravidian Model and Social Justice, but it has failed to implement important central government schemes, which is another anomaly.

Madras High Court's direction to DMK government

Based on a Madurai-based NGOs case, the Madurai High Court bench sought direction from the government to utilize the funds under the scheme completely. The petitioner requested that the State be directed to spend the amount by offering chances to students from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The surplus money could be allocated towards providing education to eligible candidates, and the money might be used to fulfil the candidates' financial requirements. He additionally requested that the government establish dedicated counters at the Adi Dravidar Welfare Offices in Madurai and other Southern districts to disseminate information about application forms, important dates, and prospectus for various educational schemes. This is intended to raise awareness among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes about educational opportunities.

The petitioner claimed that the funds allocated for the schemes were not reaching the eligible individuals, and a significant number of them were clueless about the existence of these schemes. Moreover, the petitioner expressed dissatisfaction with the Department's lack of a satisfactory response when he inquired about the application form for the scheme to pursue

a Ph.D. overseas. Over the past five years, a total of Rs 927 crore has been returned to the government as unutilized funds through the plan. It seems that the DMK government deliberately did not allocate the cash for the SC/ST welfare initiatives and returned the funds without being fully utilized.

The petitioner said that the government should fully provide the funds for the betterment of the students belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. In response to a public interest litigation petition, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court Justices Abdul Quddhose and S. Srimathy have issued a notice to the State government. The court instructed the government to retrieve Rs 927 crore, which the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department had transferred to the State government as unused funds. The bench observed grave negligence of funds to be used for the welfare of students belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is siphoned for general measures.

God's own country left the SC/STs in lurch

The amount of funds set aside for SC students is 122.16 crore, and the money set aside for ST students is 16.53 crore, for a total of 138.69 crore. The fund is not yet released. Many SC and ST students, especially those in higher education programmes, have had their educational opportunities severely affected by this recklessness. In the same way, the government has stopped giving Rs. 5,000 to SC students, who do exceptionally well on their SSLC exams. Also, the policy of giving away 50% of professional course seats to people who pass the entrance test has been stopped, and marginalized MBBS students are required to shell out Rs 5,480 every month as their stipend is terminated.

The Chief Minister's upcoming Adivasi-Dalit Mukhamukham programme is yet another betrayal of the SC-ST group. Even though Pinarayi has been in power for almost eight years but the government still has not come up with a clear SC-ST policy. Instead, they are indulging in image building meetings with the SC/ST people in every constituency to gather support for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The reality is that funds have not been disbursed for the past two years.

The RTI filed by Bhim Mission in Kerala revealed that the MPs from Kerala between 2019 and 2023 lapsed Rs.64.58 crores, around 82.5% of their allocation under the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The Chairman of the Bhim Mission,



Adv. Saji K Cheraman said, “There is a rule that the MPs should utilize 22.5% of the total MP fund for the welfare of SC/ST communities. However, only 17.51% of the total funds were utilized by MPs from the state. It is appalling even the SC/ST MPs like Remya Haridas, Kodikunnil Suresh and K Soma Prasad unused Rs.5.54 crores when Dalit and Tribals are seeking for basic welfare measures”.

Populist schemes erode social justice

The Tamil Nadu administration has faced accusations of purported budget diversions before. Over the last decade, both the AIADMK and DMK administrations have faced allegations of misappropriating money designated for the welfare of SC/ST communities. These funds were allegedly redirected towards the implementation of several general projects, including the provision of free colour televisions, bicycles, laptops and the establishment of Periyar Memorial Equality Villages. The Tamil Nadu Indian Republic Party’s general secretary, E Anbuventhan, lodged a complaint stating that funds were being diverted from the SCSP to the women’s rights grant scheme. In his complaint, he stated that this violates the guidelines, rules, and regulations of the Central Government regarding the Special Central Assistance to SC Sub-Plan. Shalin Maria Lawrence, a Dalit author, argues that the State government cannot simply reallocate funds from a scheme approved by the Centre in order to fulfil a campaign pledge. She further added that this is a clear case of discrimination against Dalits, and this injustice is shocking for even non-Dalits.

Such rampant diversion of funds, which is specifically designed to promote the well-being of the Dalits, lack of transparency and accountability of Tribal Welfare and Adi Dravidar Department is adding to the woes. T. Anand, director of the ADW department, stated that the department’s return of funds under specific schemes cannot be held accountable. There are money-related complications with specific initiatives, which we are diligently attempting to rectify. It is not true that the ADW department is not spending the funds allocated to SC/ST individuals. There is a need for a website to showcase all information regarding the fund’s allocation and utilization related to SC/ST schemes.

NCSC notice to Tamil Nadu

According to data from 2014 to 2018 obtained through the Right to Information (RTI) Act, untouchability is still practiced in over 640 villages across 20 districts in Tamil Nadu. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) revealed data in 2022 indicating a rise in crimes against

Scheduled Castes (SCs) from 1,144 instances in 2019 to 1,274 cases in 2020 and further to 1,377 cases in 2021.

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes has notified the Tamil Nadu government in response to a grievance. The objection alleges that the State government intends to use funds from the Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan to finance a portion of the Rs 7,000 crore for its Kalaingar Mahalir Urimai Thittam scheme in the Financial Year 2023-24. The funds granted under the Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan were specifically intended for the well-being of individuals belonging to the Scheduled Caste. This money must not be redirected for any other objective. VA Ramesh Nathan, director of the Social Awareness Society for Youths (SASY), defended the government’s usage of money from the SCSP to support SC/ST beneficiaries in several other programmes in response to the accusation. Nathan stated that it falls within the scope of the initiative to do so.

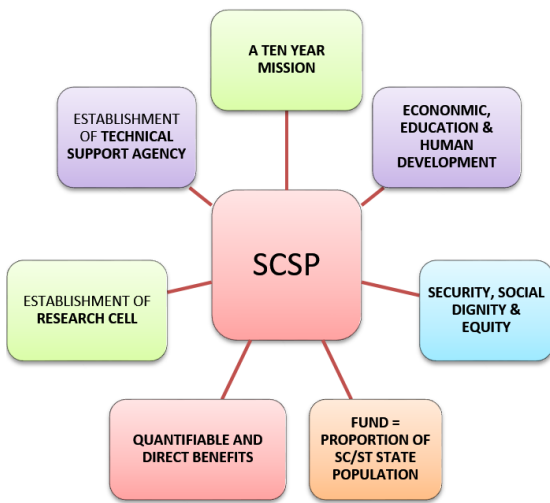
The amount of funds set aside for SC students is 122.16 crore, and the money set aside for ST students is 16.53 crore, for a total of 138.69 crore. The fund is not yet released. Many SC and ST students, especially those in higher education programmes, have had their educational opportunities severely affected by this recklessness.

Subtle strategy of fund reduction

In Kerala’s budget for the fiscal year 2022-23, a sum of Rs 151.59 crore has been allocated for the educational development of SC/ST/OBC and minority groups, which is a decrease from the previous year’s allocation of Rs 446.07 crore. The Mukhyamantri Vidyarthi Pratibha Yojana, a government-funded initiative that offers scholarships to students belonging to ST/SC/OBC and minority communities in grades IX to XII, experienced a significant decrease of 95.5% in funding this year compared to the previous year. The funding allocation dropped from Rs 100 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 4.50 crore this year. Kerala’s numerous students from SC/ST communities in various universities across the state are at risk of discontinuing their education due to the prolonged delay in the disbursement of money.

In the last two years, they have organized several demonstrations, submitted petitions, and held meetings with officials and ministers. However, none of these efforts have yielded any

concrete outcomes. Nevertheless, the delay in receiving financial assistance has had an impact on tribal and Dalit students, who are engaged in various higher education courses in the state. Within the past two years, it is anticipated that over 100 undergraduate and postgraduate students have dropped out from different colleges. Badrud Duja Naqvi, a former High Court Judge, stated in the National Confederation of Dalit Adivasi Organizations (NACDAOR) that in our nation, individuals exhibit great generosity towards religious institutions but display reluctance in assisting the impoverished. He advocated for the recognition of the legal status of the SC/ST sub-plan. The primary objective of the SC/ST sub-plan should be to facilitate job creation and enhance the educational attainment of Dalits and Adivasis.



Discontinuation of funds in Andhra Pradesh

The Telugu Desam Party charges that the YSRCP administration in Andhra Pradesh, under the leadership of former TDP Minister Kondru Muralimohan, has discontinued 27 welfare initiatives for Scheduled Castes. They claim that funds are being withheld from the SC corporation, depriving SC families of the opportunity to achieve self-reliance.

TDP also accused the government of misappropriating the sub-plan funds by redirecting them towards the Navarathnalu scheme, which encompasses nine programmes that benefit all communities rather than solely the SC/ST communities for which the funds were originally designated. Professor K Laxmi Narayana from the University of Hyderabad stressed the need to develop tailored initiatives for SCs and STs, considering each family member’s

specific circumstances. The government should incentivize education through scholarships, implement free education initiatives, and foster self-employment programmes rather than employing them as just symbolic gestures.

KCR diverted funds in Telangana

Congress leader Jeevan Reddy accuses the BRS that during the Congress tenure, we implemented the SC sub-plan and ST sub-plan to allocate funds to provide essential amenities and other financial resources to the respective communities. However, KCR altered it, renaming it as the SC Development Fund and ST Development Fund. Between 2020 and 2022, the government allocated 30,000 crores for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes (SC) and 20,000 crores for the Scheduled Tribes (ST). However, these funds were not utilized.

The government’s implementation of the double-bedroom housing project did not provide houses. They could have built dwellings if the government had allocated one lakh rupees for Dalits. The government is required to allocate and spend the cash on an annual basis. The budget should include provisions for carrying forward any remaining money and allocating new funds specifically for the benefit of SC and ST communities. Nevertheless, the state government mostly utilizes the cash and has implemented a provision to retain any remaining assets without distributing further money.

The National Dalit Watch has identified major disparities in funding allocation for the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) Sub-plan in Uttar Pradesh for the fiscal year 2024-25. The SC/ST budget allocation was Rs. 43,963 crores, which accounted for only 18.12% of the total scheme budget of Rs. 2,42,609 crores. The total deficit amounts to 38,672 crores, including a gap of 6,257 crore in the plan allocation and an additional diversion of 32,415 crore towards non-targeted allocation. The funds are designated for the state and national roadways, as well as for the distribution infrastructure of UPPCL (Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited).

Most of the States in India are widely practising the diversion of funds for their populist schemes despite the political ideology. For the unrealistic election promises, States are using SC/ST funds to encourage the rich. Social justice remains a distant dream even after seven decades; the deprived are oppressed in novel ways, which is established as the norm in caste society.

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Untold story of Sandeshkhali

People belonging to the deprived class were the worst victims of atrocities by SK Shahjahan, who enjoyed political support from CPI (M) initially and later by TMC. All kinds of serious crimes took place in Sandeshkhali but nobody bothered to look into the cries of people. Country woke up to Sandeshkhali only after victim women took the streets.



Dr. Partha



“The Devil fears individuals who push upward from the ashes in their destruction.”

This quote conveys the concept of growth and transformation, which can render the devil powerless. ‘Sandesh’ literary means Sweets in Bengal but ironically the place Sandeshkhali happens to be the den of terror.

Demography and Geographical Location of Sandeshkhali

Sandeshkhali is located in the lower Ganga Delta, almost at the mouth of Bay of Bengal, a part of the North Bidyadhari Plain, one of the three physiographic regions in the district North 24 Parganas and surrounded by the rivers Vidyadhari, Raimangala, Dansa, and Kalindi on all sides. The wide Dansa, Kalindi, and Raimangal rivers flow through the area in a junction of the Ichamoti River frequently

affected by natural calamities such as cyclones, thunderstorms with occasional hail and floods. Ghojadanga Indo- Bangladesh border is only 48 km from Sandeshkhali, through the Sundarban Delta and Bay of Bengal riverine and maritime border it is well connected with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Sandeshkhali consists of two community development blocks and nine islands in remote areas of Sundarbans region with a total population of 330,106, among them, Hindus are 243,002 and Muslims are 85,884. The marginalized Hindus are the actual inhabitants; high density is also explained partly by the rapid growth of urbanization, decadal growth and the influx of refugees from East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). Subsequently due to the unfenced maritime border and favourable socio-political environment, a huge infiltration (Zamati Jehadis

from Bangladesh) started in the left regime that picks high in current decade by sheltering Rohingya's from Myanmar.

Sandeshkhali – I CD Block	Sandeshkhali –II CD Block
Hindu - 77.17% -124,229 (SC – 44.91% - 72,300 ST-23.42% -37,695) Muslim – 22.27% (35,855) Christian - 0.43% (694)	Hindu –70% - 118,793 (SC – 30.90% -50,812, ST- 25.95% - 42,674) Muslim – 30% (50,029) Christian - 0.39% (643)

Affected Areas - Barmajur-1, Durgamandap, Barmajur-II, Jilaikhali, Baymari-2, Hatgacha and Najat

Types of Atrocities - Murder, Rape, Physically Assault, Extortion, lease Due, Forcefully Withdraw, False Case etc.

Accused Person – SK Shahjahan, Sk Siraj, Akbar Ali, Uttam sarder, Shibu Hazra, Ajit Maity, Sahidul Gazi, Jainal Abedin, Nurul Sardar and others.

Political Patronage and rise of SK Shahjahan

In left regime the coinage ‘scientific rigging’ has been popularly encapsulated by the party cadres, locally called Harmad (political goons). CPM assigned the task of area domination by LCM- local committee members, and under the political safeguards of LCM countless notorious bullhead maroons grew up. It is reported that SK Shahjahan entered politics in 2003, with the support of uncle Muslim Sheikh, elected as Panchayat Pradhan. He, along with his uncle, held such a strong hold on the area, even in 2011, the fall of CPM in Bengal and rise of Trinamool Congress with thumping majority, Sandeshkhali remained a leftist bastion till 2016. SK Shahjahan was the chief election agent of CPIM- MLA Nirapad Sardar, who won the Assembly election in 2011 from Sandeshkhali but in the changing wave of politics, clever Shahjahan joined TMC in 2013. Gradually he became very close associate of TMC minister Joytipriya Mallick, (now in jail, accused of illegally selling ration rice) started unbridled torture and corruption in entire Sandeshkhali. Soon he became the most notorious leader of the Trinamool Congress party in the area due to his involvement in illegal activities in various sectors including sheep and cow smuggling, brick fields, fishery, transport and vegetable syndicates.

He harboured a large number of anti-social activities spread over the entire Sandeshkhali Assembly. His staunch companions Uttam

Sardar, Shibu Hazra and Ghiyasuddin Ghazi inflicted massive atrocities on the common people. They took over the land by coercion from the oppressed people and forcefully overthrew them; merciless torturers forced their way into SC/ST people and looted their valuables. In such beastly cheers, they were brutally torturing the women, the torture on them reached such a state that every day they called the housewives of the village to the party office on the pretext of various activities at night and physically harmed them in various ways.

SK Shahjahan and his family are very closely connected with Bangladesh Jamaat –e- Islam (banned) radical terror group and has been sheltering Rohingyas since decade. It is through Jamaat- Rohingya army of Shahjahan, who deliberately snatched the fundamental voice of democracy. Sheikh Shahjahan and his shadow companions have been oppressing the helpless SC/ST people of the village for a long time, illegally occupying all their paddy land for fishing and farming.

The nexus was exposed to the countrymen and sparked the protest to every corner of Bengal. National commission for SC and ST, National Women Commission and National Human Rights Commission including a few independent fact-finding teams, Nationalist SC/ST organization CSSR and Topshili Utthan also visited Sandeshkhali and showed solidarity to the victims’ family.

Even the forest department’s land was sold for crores of rupees by cutting down the forest trees, and the President and Zilla Parishad member of Sandeshkhali block-2 confiscated that money. Shahjahan’s brother SK Sirajuddin and his other followers forcibly grabbed the land of SC/ST people, since the earlier leftist government didn’t allow them to record. About 800 bighas of land are forcibly registered by such miscreants, it is a common practice to change the nature of agricultural land, sweet water ponds by put in salt water into the fishery field.

On January 12, ED officers along with central forces were attacked, later hospitalized while



searching the house of Sheikh Shahjahan, even journalists were also manhandled by the party cadres, when police were mute spectators. In recent investigation, it has been revealed that SK Shahjahan instructed them to hurl a fierce attack upon the agency and absconded from the place. It was inflammatory for the village people, who have been suffering for a long time, they started protesting and demand justice, Local police forcibly tried to stop their agitation. The villagers alleged that the Trinamool workers attacked them with firearms in front of the police, and Trinamool leader Shibu Hazra's men also fought with the villagers, resulting in many injuries. The injured were taken to the local hospital for treatment, it was found that all the villagers were attacked by the Trinamool miscreants, but none of the attackers were arrested, instead the police arrested 19 villagers including women and minor school goers, registered 177 cases.



The nexus was exposed to the countrymen and sparked the protest to every corner of Bengal. National commission for SC and ST, National Women Commission and National Human Rights Commission including a few independent fact-finding teams, Nationalist SC/ST organization CSSR and Topshili Utthan also visited Sandeshkhali and showed solidarity to the victims' family. The village women took the protest to the streets with sticks, brooms and hand-nails. The resistance heats up from that moment, the common villagers become enraged. The helpless villagers united and surrounded the Sandeshkhali police station and stood in protest. The protesters demanded that Trinamool leaders Shahjahan, Shibu Hazra, Uttam Sardar, Laltu Ghosh should be arrested. After all these incidents, a large police force, including the Rapid Action Force, was on the spot. Dhamakhali-Sandeshkhani ferry services stopped. All the shops were also closed, the police brutally lathi charged the helpless

villagers, one Krishna prasad Laiya was seriously injured and some villagers were also left in a bloody state. The houses of these women agitators and victimized women complainants have been attacked at night by the gangs of Sheikh Shahjahan. Houses of protesting women are vandalized and simultaneously stripped and beaten causing further uproar among the common villagers.

Due to the mountainous pressure and spontaneous outrage from the villagers, the police arrested two others, including Uttam Sardar, and Shibu Haza and the police-administration pacified the agitators saying that the rest would be arrested. The whole of West Bengal is roaring with Sandesh Khali. The state government officials are unable to bring the situation under control. They opened a complaint kiosk where nearly 600 applications were submitted. But Sandesh Khali erupted again and again due to the continuous demand for arrest of master mind Sheikh Shahjahan.

In the direction of Kolkata High court, the key accused SK Shahjahan was arrested by police from Minakha after 56 days of absconding and handed over to CBI but co-accused SK Siraj (brother of Shahjahan) still roaming free, despite all kinds of atrocities happened there against SC/STs but unfortunately relevant section of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (PoA Act, 1989) were not applied against the Tyrants. Under the gigantic pressure by local organizations, media, Judiciary and the spontaneous outrage of local people West Bengal government initiated the process to revert the possession of lands.

In the midst of adversity, the spirit of solidarity and compassion that emerged in Sandeshkhali serves as a beacon of hope for marginal communities across the nation. The lessons learned from the decade long heinous activities underscore the need for concerted action to safeguard the integrity of national security from the invaders and Satans inside our political system to further build a more resilient and sustainable future, where the most vulnerable among us are safeguarded from the ravages of devils' fury. As the residents of Sandeshkhali continue to rebuild their lives in the wake of torture and atrocity, their resilience and perseverance stands as a testament to the indomitable human spirit in the face of adversity.

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Babu Jagjivan Ram: Symbol of political struggle for values

On the occasion of birth anniversary of veteran leader Jagjivan Ram, affectionately called as Babuji, Unheard Voices recalls his contribution.

Rajendra Prasad



Jagjivan Ram, fondly called Babuji, was one of the legendary politicians of his period. He was a frontline warrior of the freedom struggle and an architect of modern India. His multifaceted personality awakened consciousness in all sections of society during his time. He was an extraordinary Parliamentarian, national leader and champion of the have-nots of the country. After independence his stature became so high that Dalits treated him as their saviour. Even the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi affectionately addressed him with respect and

called him Babuji. His birthday is celebrated as 'Samta Diwas' across the country.

Birth, education and untouchability

Jagjivan Ram was born on April 5, 1908 in village Chandwa near Ara, the then Shahabad district of Bengal Presidency in an ordinary untouchable family. Now it is known as Bhojpur (Ara) district of Bihar. His father's name was Shobhi Ram and mother's name was Vasanti Devi. He lost his father at the tender age of six years. Jagjivan Ram was admitted to a village school of the area. Thereafter he took

admission in Ara town school in 1922. After passing matriculation examination in the first division from Ara. He moved to Banaras Hindu University for further study on the invitation of Madan Mohan Malaviya. Here also he faced the bitter experience of being an untouchable. The block servant (kahar) of Birla hostel mess refused to clean his utensils and the barber refused to cut his hair.

Aggrieved by the practice of untouchability and inhuman treatment, Jagjivan Ram decided to leave BHU after passing I.Sc. He moved to Vidyasagar College, Calcutta for higher studies. He passed the B.Sc. examination in 1931 from Calcutta University.

Role of Congress in upliftment of Jagjivan Ram

After Poona Pact 1932, Congress was in dire need of a Dalit face. A conference of Harijan Sewak Sangh in November 1932 under the leadership of Dr. Rajendra Prasad was organized in which Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj and Congress people participated. By chance Jagjivan Ram was also present in that meeting and his speech in that conference impressed Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Gandhiji was informed. In 1933 Jagjivan Ram was appointed as secretary of Harijan Sevak Sangh, Bihar.

To remove this distrust of Dalits against Congress leadership, brilliant and agile people from Dalit society were needed. Jagjivan Ram proved this ability on that standard. He became increasingly associated with the Congress and emerged as Dalit face of the Congress. The influence of Congress among Dalits became deep. Jagjivan Ram played an important role in linking Dalits with Congress, resulting in him being nominated as member Bihar Legislative Council in 1936 and again elected to Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1937. He was arrested in the freedom movement on two

occasions during the non-cooperation movement 1940 and Quit India Movement 1942. Jagjivan Ram was elected unopposed in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1946 and was made Minister of Labour in the Interim Government on September 2, 1946.

Gradually Jagjivan Ram became a strong pillar of the Congress. After independence, his status got elevated. Even in important decisions his active participation and suggestions were honoured. At that time, it was said that Congress has three strong pillars namely – Brahmin, Harijan and Mailman. The Congress stood on these three pillars for a long time and ruled across the country. Congress played the catalytic role in political upliftment of Jagjivan Ram.


Contribution as Union Minister

Jagjivan Ram was cabinet minister for 31 years and worked with four Prime Ministers. He was the youngest minister in the interim Government in 1946. He won all the Lok Sabha elections repeatedly from Sasaram parliamentary constituency till his demise in 1986. Perhaps none has had such a long political innings. Jagjivan Ram's contributions as a Union Minister was exemplary. The remarkable work of Babuji has been to implement and get the reservation laws effectively done in government services for scheduled castes and tribes and to make the provisions for reservation in promotion. In 1957, an order was issued that the Bhangi/Valmiki caste be appointed as Pani Pande (Waterman) at all railway stations. This work of Babuji was called a revolutionary step of that era.

Babuji believed in providing uniform education in government schools to all children. He said that his children were not educated in a public school. He said that the children of all government employees and people representatives should get their education in government schools. If this was to happen, the standard of the government schools would also go up. People never think of admitting their children to private schools.

During 1966-67 there was an ominous disaster due to drought causing a famine. The nation faced an unprecedented food crisis, and a mutiny-like situation developed in the country leading to food riots and other crimes of hunger and famine. During this challenging time of assuming charge of the Food & Agriculture Ministry, he declared that, no one in the country would be allowed to die of hunger. He skillfully navigated the nation out of the misery of famine and brought the nation to the door of the green revolution. The nation became fully self-reliant in food production and also emerged as an exporter of food grains. Babuji was called the harbinger of the green revolution.

As Defence Minister his most remarkable achievement was liberation of Bangladesh from the oppressive rule of the West Pakistani establishment. He announced that "we don't



want war, but if that war happens, it will be fought on the land of Pakistan” and this is what exactly happened in the war. It was the first occasion in the history of war that the Pakistan army consisting of 93000 troops surrendered before the Indian army. And Pakistan was divided into two parts and a new nation Bangladesh came into existence. Whole nation felt glorified after the 1971 victory in the Indo-Pak war. The charismatic personality of Jagjivan Ram emerged out of this glorious victory.

By the time of Emergency in 1975, the gap of differences with Indira Gandhi began to take shape, it widened. After the silence of the Emergency, in 1977, as soon as Indira Gandhi announced to dissolve the Lok Sabha and hold fresh elections, on February 2, 1977, Jagjivan Ram resigned from the post of minister and the Congress and formed a party called "Congress for Democracy". The Congress was wiped out from North India in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections and the Janata Party came to power.

Believer of uniform education

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Staunch supporter of democracy & casteless society

He was of the opinion that the vibrancy of functioning of democracy depends upon the social acceptances of the ideals of equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. Administration runs on the wheel of fear and respect. Babuji believed that India got political freedom, but all Indians are not free. Poverty and casteism is an anathema. One who is poor is not independent. Poverty troubles everyone. It does not differentiate caste, religion and regions. He further observed that Democracy and caste system cannot co-exist. India does not have democracy. It has caste-crazy. So long as the caste system prevails in India, we can have only a perverted, disabled type of democracy. The two cannot move together. It is going on now, because the power is still in the hands of the dominant castes. While discussing British colonialism, Babuji used to say that it was injurious. We ended British imperialism in 150 years. But could not end the empire of caste even in thousands of years. Caste colonialism is far more terrifying and dangerous than British

colonialism. The casteism of the country is also a big empire. Democracy cannot run without destroying its empire.

Jagjivan Ram supported the creation of casteless society. Until and unless, casteless society is not established, reservation is essential for socially deprived classes. Babuji did not consider reservation as an economic question. It has always been a social question. The society is divided into graded inequality of castes; reservation is a question of share in the State resources. Reservation is not a poverty alleviation programme. But it is a weapon to change the status-quo of orthodox Hindu social order. Prior to this, all the beneficial reservations were for upper castes only. There were hundred percent reservations in the temple for Brahmin, which is one of the strongest power centres. It controls the mindset of the people. Constitutional reservation is a small compensation of Vedic reservation.

To eradicate caste and educational inequality, he advocated that (1) marriage of bride and bridegroom of same caste should be made illegal (2) there should not be caste denoting title in any one's name. (3) equal education for all and law for compulsory education of Government employees and people's representatives' children in Government Schools (4) To fill the post of priest of a temple, competitive examination be conducted, and it should not be reserved for a particular class or caste.

Babuji said that All Hindus are not equal. No Hindu is equal to another Hindu. Hinduism is not a religion, but an ideology based on inequality and superstition which discriminates in the name of caste between man and man. He stressed the need to amend these all Smritis, and religious texts and delete all the objectionable portions, which are unscientific and insulting for any caste. For this purpose, he appealed for the formation of a committee like the Virat Hindu Samaj, or Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti.

Jagjivan Ram used to express his views in a very effective manner. He had a wonderful grip on saint literature, Vedic literature and anthropology. His lectures had a depth of thought and what he used to say was intuitive. It appealed to the people, inspired them to think and do something. Jagjivan Ram was always looking forward to everyone's hope. He was a man of an untouchable family who never proved backward in his actions and conduct. He proved to be forward to front.

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Social Studies Foundation (SSF) recognized as Research Institute under ICSSR Scheme

The Social Studies Foundation (SSF), based in Pune, has achieved a significant milestone by getting an accreditation as a research institute under the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) Recognized Institute Scheme. This recognition highlights SSF's dedication in promoting research and similar activities aimed at fostering positive social change, particularly focusing on marginalized communities, notably the Scheduled Castes. The Social Studies Foundation is a Company Established in March 2019 under section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, SSF operates as a Non-Profit Organization with a core mission to promote harmony and enhance the well-being of marginalized groups, with a specific emphasis on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within its organizational framework.

SSF aims to foster harmony and strengthen the well-being of marginalized communities, primarily the Scheduled Castes, through its research initiatives and community outreach programs, with a mission to spread harmony and build a discrimination-free nation.

Social Studies Foundation had organized a series of enlightening seminars under the theme "Marginalization and Social Inclusion: Cultivation of Indo socio-cultural thought and Contribution of deprived classes in the freedom struggle of India," in JNU Delhi and Delhi University in 2022. These seminars have provided a platform for robust discussions and critical reflections on the historical and contemporary issues surrounding Scheduled Castes in independent India. The seminars have not only facilitated an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by Scheduled Castes but have also shed light on their significant contributions to India's freedom struggle and socio-cultural fabric. Through engaging dialogues and scholarly presentations. Participants have gained valuable insights into the rich heritage and resilience of these communities.

Under a theme: Scheduled Castes in independent India- Present & Future SSF had organized one day conclave at Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Calcutta and Lucknow from July


2022 to November 2022. Where we have invited some Scheduled Castes Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors, Research Scholars under the age bog 45 including ladies from the area nearby the above locations and the total attendance of these conclaves was 314 including women. In this conclave they have a discussion on strength of Scheduled Castes, Problems faced, Solution to problems and our role in uplifting the community.

"UNHEARD VOICES", is an e-periodical, which SSF publishes on 14th Day of each month and now it has completed three years of publishing the same. The voices of deprived people continue to be unheard even in the age of various platforms, provided by social media. "UNHEARD VOICES" is providing a platform to the deprived people to express themselves. This is a representative national forum for the purpose & it was started from the 14th April 2021 (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Birth Anniversary). This is a voice of deprived people with positive narrative & it contains articles, news, events, and success stories, struggle and all other information for all the men, women, youths and seniors across the country. UNHEARD VOICES is publishing the information, which one may not read in established media.

Social Studies Foundation takes immense pride in announcing its accreditation as a Recognized Research Institute by the prestigious Indian Council for Social Science Research, Delhi. This accreditation serves as a testament to the Foundation's commitment to excellence in research, education, and advocacy within the realm of social sciences, particularly concerning Scheduled Castes.

Future project:

A comprehensive exploration of the life and legacy of Ahilyadevi Holkar a Queen of Malva region, in commemoration of her third birth centenary. Ahilyadevi, a symbol of courage and leadership, played a pivotal role in shaping the history of India. This project aims to deal deep into her remarkable journey, highlighting her enduring impact on society and the empowerment of marginalized groups.



Drought dilemma: Urgent need for equity in education

In a country where the struggle for basic necessities often outweighs the luxuries, the current drought-like situation has cast a harsh shadow over the educational pursuits of many. Maharashtra is facing such a situation because of scanty rainfall and its college-going populace grappling with a burden that threatens their academic endeavours.

For Kuldeep Ambekar, an Ambedkarite student activist in Pune, the call for waiving off university exam fees at Savitribai Phule Pune University is not just a demand but a plea for survival. Through his organization, Student Helping Hand, Ambekar sheds light on the plight of students hailing from drought-affected regions, whose aspirations for higher education are stifled by financial constraints exacerbated by last year's poor rainfall.

The repercussions of this drought extend far beyond parched fields and dwindling water reserves; they seep into the corridors of education,



where dreams are often snuffed out before they can take flight. As meteorological data reveals, over 500 districts across India are currently grappling with drought conditions, ranging from mildly dry to severely arid. The implications for agricultural production are dire, with experts warning of looming shortages and diminished yields.

The severity of the situation becomes apparent when considering the socio-economic ramifications. Students who are unable to afford exam fees face the grim prospect of dropping out of college, forced to seek employment in metropolitan areas where menial jobs offer scant solace amidst the concrete jungle. This mass exodus from rural to urban landscapes only serves to deepen the chasm of inequality, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement.

Madhavan Rajeevan, a former secretary at the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences, emphasizes the need to contextualize the drought statistics within the ground realities of different regions. While meteorological indicators may paint a broad picture of dry conditions, the impact varies

widely depending on factors such as geographical location and agricultural practices.

The monsoonal breaks of August 2023, marked by a prolonged absence of rainfall, further exacerbated the crisis, leaving vast swathes of land parched and barren. As Rajeevan notes, the skewed distribution of rainfall has dealt a heavy blow to agricultural communities, whose livelihoods hinge on the capricious whims of the monsoon.

Amidst this backdrop of uncertainty and hardship, the right to education emerges as a beacon of hope, a lifeline for those grappling with the harsh realities of drought. Yet, this fundamental right remains elusive for many, overshadowed by economic disparities and systemic neglect. In the face of such adversity, the onus falls upon state governments to uphold the principles of equity and justice. Waiving off exam fees for students from drought-affected areas is not just an act of benevolence; it is a reaffirmation of our commitment to equality and inclusivity. It is a recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their socio-economic background.

As we navigate the tumultuous waters of climate change and environmental degradation, we must not lose sight of our moral obligations to future generations. Education is not a privilege reserved for the affluent few; it is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the fabric of our society.

In Maharashtra, and indeed across India, the time has come to stand in solidarity with the marginalized and the vulnerable. By waiving off exam fees for drought-affected students, we send a powerful message of compassion and empathy. We affirm our commitment to building a more just and equitable society, where opportunity knows no bounds and where the pursuit of knowledge is not hindered by the vagaries of nature. In the final analysis, it is not just exam fees that we are waiving; it is the hopes and dreams of countless young minds, yearning for a better future. It is a small gesture with profound implications, a gesture that speaks volumes about who we are as a society and what we stand for. In the face of drought, let us not forget the thirst for knowledge that burns bright within every student's heart. Let us quench that thirst, not with water, but with the promise of a brighter tomorrow.

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Remembering 'Millet Man'

PV Satheesh, the visionary founder of Deccan Development Society, passed away on March 19, leaving behind a legacy of empowerment for Dalit women in Telangana. Through his pioneering work with millets, Satheesh transformed the lives of thousands of women across 75 villages, particularly from the Dalit community. His efforts not only provided livelihood opportunities but also fostered self-sustained agriculture initiatives that empowered these women economically and socially.

Arrested for blocking drinking water

Around 100 residents of intermediate castes from Nellaithiruthu and Pallikottai villages in Tamil Nadu were arrested by Manur police for obstructing the laying of a drinking water pipeline to Alavanthankulam village, where Scheduled Caste families reside. The intermediate caste residents opposed the pipeline works, claiming that their share of drinking water would be diminished if the pipeline was laid. The dispute, ongoing for years, led to a court intervention, and despite the Madras High Court's directive to complete the pipeline within two weeks, the intermediate caste residents once again disrupted the works. The police intervened, arresting nearly 100 individuals and allowing officials to resume the pipeline installation.

Dr. Chinnaiah Jangam Receives A.K. Ramanujan award

Dr. Chinnaiah Jangam, a Telugu descent writer and Professor of History at Carleton University in Canada, has been honored with the A.K. Ramanujan Book Prize for Translation (South Asia). The accolade recognizes his translation of 'Gabbilam: A Dalit Epic' by Gurrām Jashuva, known as the Father of Telugu Dalit Literature. This marks a historic moment as two Dalit texts, including Sailaja Paik's book, are selected for the prestigious award. Jangam's translation delves

into the Dalit Movement in pre-independence Andhra Pradesh, showcasing Jashuva's impactful contributions to challenging caste oppression through classical Telugu poetry.

Death of Dalit student sparks allegations of torture by SFI members

The family of JS Sidharth, a second-year Dalit student at the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences in Pookode, alleges that he was tortured to death by SFI (Students Federation of India) members. Sidharth's father, T Jayaprakash, claims that his son, locked inside a hostel room, was deprived of food and water for three days, and fatally beaten before being hanged. The family expresses concern over a potential political intervention in the investigation and asserts that Sidharth, a Dalit student full of life and aspirations, would not have resorted to suicide. UDF and BJP criticize the SFI, and Union Minister V Muraleedharan accuses the CPM of protecting the accused.

Appointing Kishor Makwana and Love Kush Kumar to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) serves as a vital institution in upholding the rights and welfare of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India. SCs, historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities, face various challenges including social discrimination, economic deprivation, and limited access to resources and opportunities. The NCSC's primary mandate is to address these issues by ensuring that SCs receive equitable treatment and opportunities for their socio-economic advancement.

By appointing Kishor Makwana as Chairman and Love Kush Kumar as a Member of the NCSC, there would be a clear demonstration of the government's commitment to diversity and inclusion in leadership positions. Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh are states with substantial SC populations, and appointing individuals from these regions would ensure that the perspectives and concerns of these communities are represented at the highest levels of decision-making. Overall, the appointments of Makwana and Kumar would likely be celebrated as a positive step towards effective representation and advocacy for SCs at the national level.

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DIN VISHESH

Remembering Chaitanya Mahaprabhu



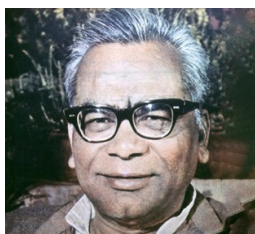
25th March

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Birth Anniversary

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, also known as Sri Chaitanya, was a 15th-century Indian saint and mystic who is considered by followers to be an incarnation of Lord Krishna. He was born in 1486 in Navadvipa, Bengal, which is present-day West Bengal, India. Chaitanya is regarded as the founder of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism tradition, a branch of Hinduism focused on devotion to Lord Krishna.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is widely regarded as a saint and spiritual leader who worked towards breaking down the caste system and promoting equality and unity among all people, regardless of their social status or background. He believed that everyone was equal in the eyes of God and that the caste system, which classified people into different social categories based on birth, hindered spiritual progress.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu attracted a large following from people from all walks of life, including the lower castes and so-called "untouchables." He treated all his followers with equal respect and dignity and encouraged them to chant the holy names of God together as a means of attaining spiritual liberation. Through his teachings and practices, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu challenged his time's prevailing social and religious norms and worked towards creating a more inclusive society. He inspired many people to reject the caste system and embrace universal love and compassion. His legacy continues to be an essential part of India's spiritual and cultural heritage. His teachings and practices challenged the rigid caste system of his time. He emphasized the equality of all beings and welcomed people of all castes and backgrounds into his spiritual community.



23rd March

Birth Anniversary
Ram Manohar Lohia



27th March

Sant Tukaram
Birth Anniversary



5th April

Babu Jagjivan Ram
Birth Anniversary



11th April

Mahatma Phule
Birth Anniversary

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