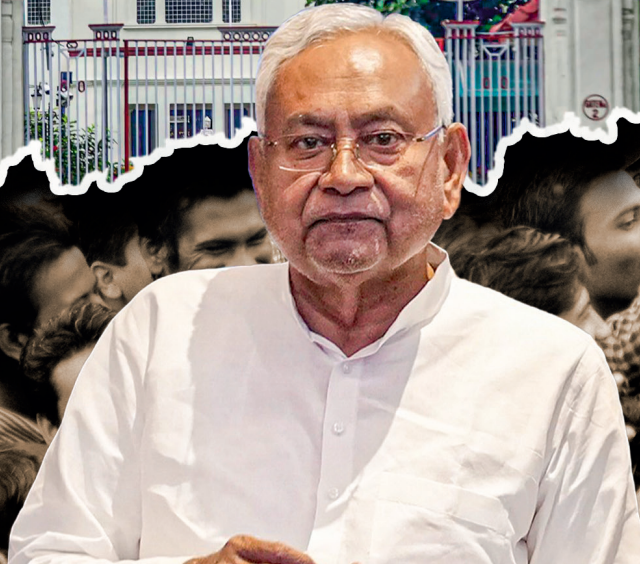


# UNHEARD VOICES<sup>®</sup>

14 JULY 2024 | Year 4 | Vol. 4

## **Bihar :** **Court blocks** **additional** **reservation**





# Message from SC reserved seats

While the Modi government has continued for the third consecutive term, the 2024 election has signalled some change among the voters. BJP could not achieve its target and had to depend upon other political parties to form the government. Several reasons are being cited for this scenario. One of the major reasons shown by political pundits is erosion of BJP's support among the deprived classes. This is a little unexpected phenomenon as BJP had performed well in 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha election by bagging majority of reserved seats. This time, INDI partners have gained seats, which were reserved for deprived communities. However, the million-dollar question is where the politics for the marginalized is heading? Are the aspirations of deprived communities being met by mainstream political parties? Is the politics of deprived communities weakened? Is the voice of deprived communities being heard?

Unfortunately, answers to these questions are negative. All mainstream political parties vouch for welfare of deprived communities but history shows that their performance and delivery have some inherent limitations. Elected representatives, who had won from reserved constituencies, find themselves helpless before policies of their respective parties. They have to follow party discipline and ideology, pushing the real concerns of deprived communities to the back seat.

Political parties, which identify themselves with deprived communities, on the other hand, are facing some serious problems. For the past few years, these parties have miserably failed to leave any mark on the electoral battle. Take the case of BSP, which was all set to be a national challenge once upon a time. BSP, however, is facing an existential crisis currently.

The other political parties have either restricted influence or more engaged in short term political compromises. We have several groups, which raise voices for deprived communities, but they miserably fail in shaping up a serious political challenge, which needs consistency, determination, conviction and a deep amount of courage.

Unfortunately, political parties, which fight for deprived communities, lack these minimum prerequisites. For example, we have several leaders, who take up the issues of deprived communities but all of them are pulling the movement in different directions. Fragmentation is a very serious curse for the movement, which is allowing other vested interests to fill the space, which is fundamentally meant for deprived communities. For decades, fragmentation, compromises with mainstream political parties and lack of integrity have resulted into a serious trust deficit, which is the most serious obstruction for these political parties. Political parties, which fight for deprived communities, need to address this issue on war footing. Instead, they are found in pushing their own political agenda and personal political promotion. Many of the leaders are found thinking for their own caste, make his/her political bargaining power stronger and work for short-term goals. None of the leaders are found thinking of all the communities, which belong to the deprived class. This situation has prevailed for a very long time – after the death of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. The only exception was the late Kanshiram, who was very clear about his objectives and strategies, required to meet them. The vacuum of credible leadership has taken a serious toll on the entire movement, which is not a good sign for a strong nation and healthy society.

For feedback please click the below link : <https://forms.gle/XWQ19k9xC1CyNr6e7>

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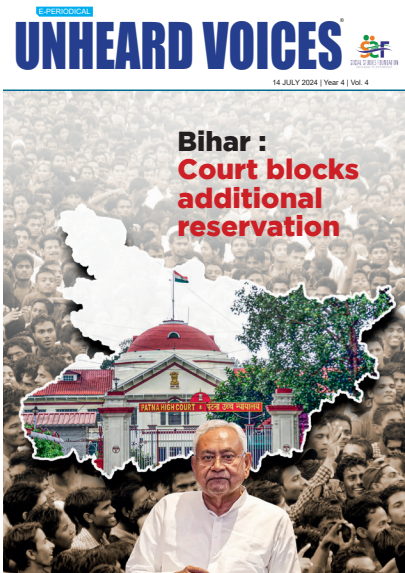
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Because of this long persisting situation, political parties, fighting for the cause of deprived communities, need to have robust introspection and learn a few lessons from the past. They need to opt for new ideas and new ways to achieve larger wellbeing of deprived communities. For example, SCs have a 17 per cent population in India. They have the potential strength to decide the political course of the country. However, SC communities stand divided at political level. On the other hand, a 17 per cent population is not sufficient to gain the required numerical strength to capture

power. For this, deprived communities ought to have strategic alliance with other political forces without forgetting their agenda and national interests. They need to accommodate other political views and make themselves more inclusive and accommodative to come out of the current crisis. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar initially formed a political party - Scheduled Caste Federation. However, later he formed the Republican Party of India, which was obviously more inclusive and accommodative ideologically. Are these parties and leaders ready to learn a few lessons from it?



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## Appeal for financial assistance



Social Studies Foundation (SSF) is working with the prime objective of conducting social studies and research of the society in a multi-disciplinary fashion. SSF focus, however, is on those people, who have been facing discrimination and are deprived of benefits of the development and democratic process. SSF logo, thus says, "Knowledge for Empowerment".

"UNHEARD VOICES" is a small step in this direction. It provides a platform to all those people, who have to be listened to by the Indian citizens to make this country united and integral. We will raise the voice of these people fearlessly. Social Studies Foundation has currently a small set-up to carry out its objectives. We, however, need financial support from our well-wishers, who agree with our objectives. We appeal to the readers and well-wishers to donate generously to the foundation.

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# Narrowing consumption gap: A Promising shift in India's social landscape



Here is optimistic news. Recent data on consumption patterns among the marginalized groups suggest a greater social economic inclusion. This is a healthy sign and would not have been achieved unless there was a major shift in attitude. Targeted intervention in social policies would accelerate the process of social cohesion.

Dr. Sonali



India, a land of diverse cultures and traditions, has long grappled with the challenges of social inequality. The caste system, a deeply entrenched social hierarchy rooted in Hinduism, has been a source of oppression and marginalization for lower-caste communities, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

However, recent data on consumption patterns among these marginalized groups suggests a promising shift towards greater social and economic inclusion. The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, released in 2023, reveals that consumption spending among marginalized groups has seen a faster annual growth rate of 9.2% between 2011-12 and 2022-23, compared to 8.1% for other categories. This narrowing of the consumption gap holds significant historical importance, as it represents a gradual erosion of the caste-based social hierarchy that has shaped Indian society for centuries.

## Bridging the Divide

Monthly Per capita consumption among marginalised groups					
		ST	SC	OBC	OTHERS
Rural	2011-12	1122	1252	1439	1719
	2022-23	3016	3474	3848	4392
Urban	2011-12	2193	2028	2275	3242
	2022-23	5414	5307	6177	7333

**Better Fore Caste:** Gap in consumption shrinks; spending by SC, ST, OBCs rose 1% faster each year, The Economic Times 29th June 2024.

Historically, lower-caste communities faced severe discrimination, denial of access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The consumption data now shows that this gap is slowly but surely narrowing, indicating a positive step towards greater social and economic inclusion. The monthly per capita consumption of SCs in



rural areas nearly tripled, reaching Rs 3,474 in 2022-23, compared to Rs 1,252 a decade ago in 2011-12. During the same period, per capita spending of STs and OBCs increased 2.7 times, while spending of other groups was up 2.6 times.

The catch-up was even more pronounced in urban centers, where the consumption spending of STs, SCs, and OBCs increased 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7 times, respectively, compared to 2.3 times jump witnessed by other categories. However, it is important to note that marginalized groups still consume 20-25% less than other categories across rural and urban areas, even after substantial increases over the last decade.

The historical significance of this trend cannot be overstated. The caste system has been a persistent source of social stratification and oppression in India, with lower-caste communities facing systemic barriers to social and economic mobility. The narrowing of the consumption gap represents a gradual erosion of these barriers, as marginalized groups gain greater access to economic resources and opportunities.

The future significance of this trend is equally compelling. The faster annual growth rate in consumption spending among marginalized groups suggests a future of greater equity and social mobility. This has the potential to transform the socio-economic landscape of India, as increased consumption power can translate into improved access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. Moreover, the substantial increase in monthly per capita consumption among SCs, STs, and OBCs, particularly in rural areas, signifies a rise in their standard of living. This can have far-reaching implications, such as reduced poverty and inequality, empowerment and social mobility, balanced regional development, and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

#### **Caste ladder and persistent consumption gap**

The caste system in India has been a primary driver of the enduring consumption gap between upper and lower castes. It has historically denied marginalized community's access to education, economic opportunities, and social mobility, leading to persistent poverty and lower consumption levels. Upper castes have traditionally held a disproportionate share of land, wealth, and other resources, allowing them to maintain higher consumption patterns. Meanwhile, lower-caste individuals face barriers in

accessing quality public services, such as healthcare and education, further limiting their ability to improve their standard of living.

The legacy of caste-based discrimination and social stigma has trapped many lower-caste households in intergenerational cycles of poverty, making it exceedingly difficult for them to enhance their consumption levels over time. Moreover, caste-based discrimination in the labour market has restricted the job and income-earning prospects of these marginalized groups, directly contributing to the consumption gap. Overcoming the deep-rooted influence of the caste system on India's socio-economic landscape remains a formidable challenge, but one that is crucial for achieving true equity and inclusive growth.

During a decade, this narrowing of the per capita consumption gap can be attributed to several key factors:

**The rise of alternative lending options, such as NBFC loans, private bank loans, and quick loan facilities, has played a significant role in improving access to credit for marginalized borrowers. These lenders have adopted more inclusive credit assessment practices, reduced collateral requirements, and developed tailored loan products to cater to the specific needs of lower-income households and entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds.**

#### **Targeted social welfare programs:**

The Indian government has implemented various social welfare schemes aimed at improving the living standards of marginalized communities. These include initiatives such as the PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY), which provides free food grains, and state-run programs that offer free LPG cylinders and electricity. The imputed value of these benefits has contributed to a rise in the monthly per capita consumption expenditure of rural households by Rs 87 and urban households by Rs 62.

#### **Education and healthcare:**

Efforts to improve access to quality education and healthcare for marginalized groups have had a positive impact on their



consumption patterns. As these communities gain better access to these essential services, they are able to invest more in their own development and improve their overall standard of living. Government initiatives such as scholarships, reservation in educational institutions, and targeted skill training programs have helped SCs, STs, and OBCs gain better access to quality education and employment opportunities. As marginalized groups become more educated and empowered, they are able to secure better-paying jobs, start their own businesses, and make more informed decisions about their consumption and investment choices, contributing to the faster growth in their per capita consumption expenditure compared to upper castes.

**Economic growth, Job creation:**

India’s sustained economic growth over the past decade has led to increased job opportunities and higher incomes for marginalized communities. As these groups gain greater access to economic resources, they are able to spend more on goods and services, narrowing the consumption gap with upper castes. The narrowing of the urban-rural consumption gap, particularly at lower levels of consumption, suggests that government policies aimed at improving rural incomes have been effective in lifting the consumption levels of marginalized households. This indicates that targeted interventions can make a significant difference in reducing inequality.

**Improved transport connectivity and accessibility:**

The availability of reliable and affordable transportation options has been a significant factor in reducing the consumption gap. Initiatives like the expansion of public

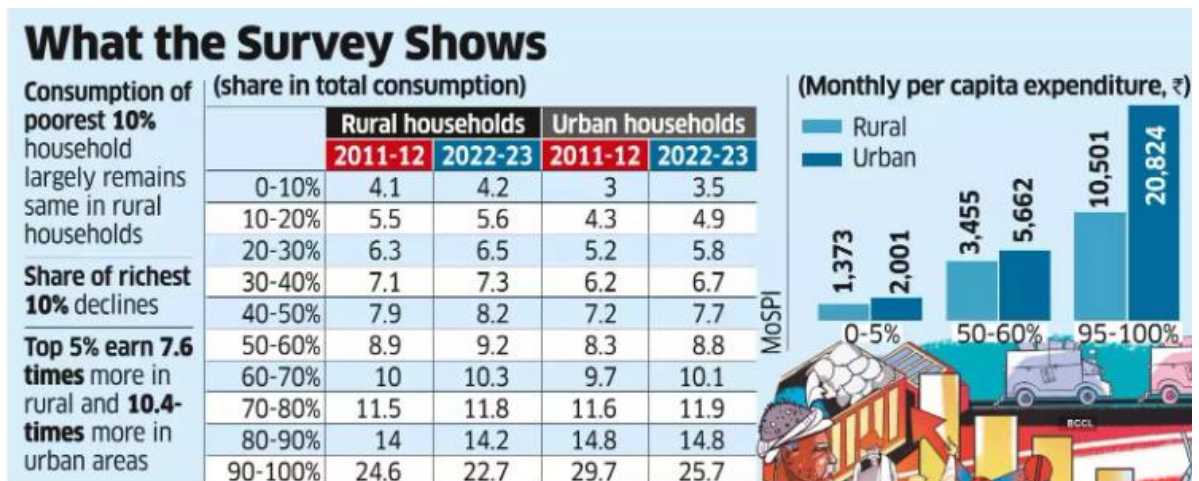
transport networks, subsidized bus and train fares for students, and innovative solutions like Zeelo’s home-to- school transport service have helped improve the accessibility of educational and economic opportunities for marginalized communities. By addressing the challenge of commuting, these transport initiatives have enabled individuals from SC, ST, and OBC backgrounds to access schools and workplaces located outside their immediate neighbourhood, thereby expanding their opportunities for social and economic advancement.

**Increased access to banking and credit:**

The rise of alternative lending options, such as NBFC loans, private bank loans, and quick loan facilities, has played a significant role in improving access to credit for marginalized borrowers. These lenders have adopted more inclusive credit assessment practices, reduced collateral requirements, and developed tailored loan products to cater to the specific needs of lower-income households and entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds. Improved access to formal banking services and credit has empowered marginalized communities to smooth their consumption, invest in productive assets, and start small businesses, contributing to the narrowing of the consumption gap.

**Decrease in the Share of Top 10% Households:** The share of the top 10% households in consumption decreased by 1.9% in rural areas and 4% in urban areas, indicating a more equitable distribution of consumption.

**Decline in the Gini Coefficient:** The Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality, showed a decline between 2011-12 and 2022-23, further corroborating the positive trend in income distribution.



Courtesy : Economic Times

Consumption inequality down in a decade, The Economic Times 8th June 2024



### **Slow climb towards consumption equity**

The consumption data on Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India paints a complex picture of progress and persistent challenges in the decades since independence. In the early years, their per capita consumption grew painfully slow, reflecting deep-rooted inequalities. The caste system's influence persisted, despite affirmative action, with SCs in rural areas consuming just Rs 1,252 in 2011-12, a fraction of other groups. While gains have been made, marginalized groups still consume 20-25% less than others, with regional disparities. The legacy of caste-based discrimination continues to limit their economic participation. The narrowing consumption gap suggests targeted interventions can reduce inequality and empower these communities. However, sustained, comprehensive efforts are needed to address systemic barriers, social stigma, and promote greater inclusion.

By investing in marginalized groups, India can unlock their potential and create a more equitable future. The gradual progress is promising, but much work remains to ensure economic benefits are shared across the social spectrum.

### **What has not changed so far?**

While the recent data shows a promising trend of narrowing consumption gaps between upper and lower castes in India, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed to achieve true equity. Some key points that have not changed and areas that require further work.

#### **Persistent Regional Disparities:**

The consumption data reveals that some states like Maharashtra, Assam, Chhattisgarh, and Kerala have experienced an increase in inequality among social groups in rural areas, while Odisha, Haryana, and Chhattisgarh are the most unequal in urban centres. Addressing these regional imbalances and ensuring equitable development across all states will be crucial for reducing the consumption gap.

#### **Systemic barriers to opportunity**

Despite improvements, marginalized communities continue to face systemic barriers in accessing quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Targeted interventions are needed to provide equal access to these essential services and dismantle the entrenched structures that perpetuate caste-based discrimination.

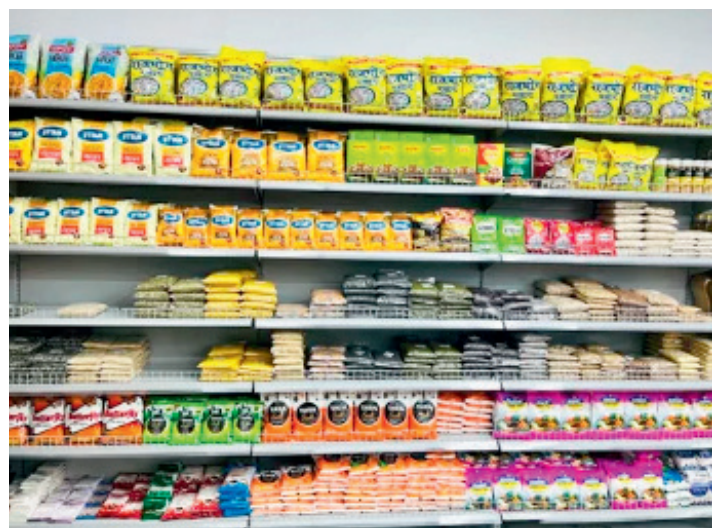
#### **Changing social attitudes**

While there are signs of a gradual shift in social attitudes, caste-based stereotypes and

discriminatory practices persist in many parts of India. Sustained efforts are required to promote social cohesion, inter-caste dialogue, and a culture of respect and inclusion for all communities.

### **Uneven Progress Across Consumption Levels**

The data shows that while the urban-rural consumption gap has narrowed at lower levels of consumption, the gap remains significant at higher levels. Ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are shared equitably across all consumption segments will be crucial for achieving true equality.



### **Lack of Holistic, Long-Term Approach**

The slow pace of progress in reducing the consumption gap since independence highlights the need for a more holistic, long-term approach to addressing caste-based inequalities. Piecemeal interventions and short-term fixes are unlikely to be effective in dismantling deeply entrenched social hierarchies.

#### **Takeaway**

In conclusion, while the narrowing of the consumption gap is a positive development, much work remains to be done to achieve true equality between upper and lower castes in India. Addressing the persistent regional disparities, systemic barriers to opportunity, and entrenched social attitudes will require sustained, comprehensive efforts on multiple fronts.

Only then can India truly realize the promise of a more just and inclusive society for all its citizens.

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Bihar High Court decision to scrap 65 per cent reservation has once again brought back the issue of limitation on reservation. Nitish Kumar's decision to increase reservation by 15 per cent is not valid now. This has sent a strong signal across the country.



## HC on Bihar reservation, brings back issue on agenda

Adv. Hrushikesh



In a significant blow to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's administration, the Patna High Court has set aside the Bihar government's recent move to increase the reservation quota from 50% to 65% for backward classes, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes in government jobs and higher educational institutions. The decision, passed by a division bench headed by Chief Justice K Vinod Chandran, addressed a series of writ petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the amendments introduced by the state government in November 2023.

### Legislative move

The Bihar government had introduced two key legislative amendments: The Bihar Reservation of Vacancies in Posts and Services (For SC, ST, EBC, and OBC)

Amendment Bill and the Bihar (In Admission and in Educational Institutions) Reservation Amendment Bill, 2023. The amendments were based on data from a recent caste survey conducted in the state, which highlighted the need for enhanced representation of these communities to promote equality in opportunity and status, as stated in the gazette notification.

### Legislative amendments introduced by Bihar government

The Bihar government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, introduced two significant legislative amendments in November 2023. These were: 1. The Bihar Reservation of Vacancies in Posts and Services (For SC, ST, EBC, and OBC) Amendment Bill 2. The Bihar (In Admission and in Educational





Institutions) Reservation Amendment Bill, 2023.

### **Objectives of amendments**

These amendments aimed to increase the existing reservation quotas for various marginalized communities in government jobs and higher educational institutions. The specific changes proposed were as follows:

- A) Scheduled Castes (SC): The reservation for SCs was proposed to be increased to 20%.
- B) Scheduled Tribes (ST): The reservation for STs was set at 2%.
- C) Extremely Backward Classes (EBC): The quota for EBCs was significantly raised to 25%.
- D) Other Backward Classes (OBC): The reservation for OBCs was adjusted to 18%.
- E) Economically Weaker Sections (EWS): An additional 10% quota was included for the EWS category.

With these changes, the total reservation in Bihar would have reached an unprecedented 75%, significantly above the 50% ceiling traditionally upheld by the Supreme Court of India.

### **Basis for amendments**

The impetus for these amendments was derived from a comprehensive caste survey conducted in the state during 2022-23. This survey collected extensive data on the socio-economic conditions of various communities in Bihar. The findings revealed substantial disparities and underrepresentation of certain communities in government jobs and educational institutions. The survey underscored the need for enhanced affirmative action to bridge these gaps and ensure equitable access to opportunities.

In the gazette notification accompanying the amendments, the Bihar government stated:

“On analysis of data collected during the ‘Caste-based Survey 2022-23,’ it is apparent that a large section of backward classes, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes need to be promoted to achieve the cherished aim of equality in opportunity and status as enshrined in the Constitution.”

This justification highlights the state government’s intent to use the survey’s findings as a basis for tailoring its reservation policies to better address the specific needs of its population. The amendments were framed as essential measures to promote social justice and equal opportunity for historically disadvantaged groups.

### **Legislative and social context**

These legislative amendments were part


of a broader effort by the Bihar government to address long-standing socio-economic disparities and ensure fair representation for marginalized communities. By increasing the reservation quotas, the government aimed to provide these communities with greater access to employment and educational opportunities, thereby fostering social mobility and economic upliftment. However, this move also positioned the Bihar government in direct conflict with the established legal precedent set by the Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney case (1992), which capped reservations at 50% unless extraordinary circumstances could justify exceeding this limit. The Bihar government argued that the socio-economic realities highlighted by the caste survey constituted such extraordinary circumstances. The introduction of these legislative amendments by the Bihar government was a bold attempt to redefine the state’s reservation policies in response to contemporary socio-economic

**Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who has been a strong advocate for increasing reservations to address social inequities. The ruling challenges his administration’s efforts to promote social justice through enhanced quotas and may impact his political standing, particularly among the backward classes and other marginalized communities who were the intended beneficiaries of the quota hike.**

data. While the intent was to promote greater social equity, the amendments faced significant legal challenges, culminating in the Patna High Court’s decision to scrap the 65% quota. The ongoing legal battle and the broader debate it has sparked highlight the complexities involved in balancing affirmative action with constitutional principles in India.

### **Court’s decision**

The Patna High Court’s ruling focused on the constitutional limitations of reservation policies. The petitioners argued that the Bihar government’s hike in the quota was beyond its legislative powers and violated



the Supreme Court's 1992 verdict in the Indra Sawhney case, which established a maximum reservation ceiling of 50%. The petitioners further contended that the increased quota was discriminatory and infringed on the fundamental rights to equality guaranteed by Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Indian Constitution.

In its judgment, the High Court agreed with the petitioners, stating that the Bihar government's move to exceed the 50% ceiling was unconstitutional and lacked sufficient justification to warrant such an exception. The court emphasized the importance of balancing affirmative action with the principles of equality and meritocracy.

The Patna High Court's ruling on the Bihar government's reservation policy highlighted critical constitutional limitations surrounding affirmative action measures. The petitioners, who challenged the government's decision, presented several key arguments rooted in constitutional law and Supreme Court precedents.

#### **Petitioners' arguments**

**1. Exceeding Legislative Powers:** The petitioners argued that the Bihar government's decision to increase the reservation quota from 50% to 65% was beyond its legislative authority. They contended that the state government had overstepped its constitutional boundaries by implementing a policy that contradicted established legal precedents.

**2. Violation of Supreme Court's verdict:** The central legal argument focused on the Supreme Court's landmark 1992 judgment in the Indra Sawhney vs. Union of India case. In this case, the Supreme Court had established a maximum ceiling of 50% for reservations in public employment and educational institutions, emphasizing that any reservation exceeding this limit would require extraordinary circumstances. The petitioners claimed that the Bihar government had failed to demonstrate such exceptional conditions, thereby violating the Supreme Court's ruling.

**3. Discrimination and fundamental rights:** The petitioners further contended that the increased quota was inherently discriminatory and violated the fundamental rights to equality as guaranteed by Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Indian Constitution. These articles collectively uphold the principles of equality before the law, non-discrimination, and equal opportunity in public employment. By proposing a 65% reservation, the petitioners argued, the Bihar government had undermined

these constitutional guarantees, creating an imbalance that favoured certain groups over others.

#### **High Court's judgment**

The Patna High Court, after thoroughly examining the arguments and legal precedents, sided with the petitioners. The court's judgment emphasized several critical points:

**1. Unconstitutionality of Exceeding the 50% Ceiling:** The court declared the Bihar government's move to exceed the 50% reservation ceiling as unconstitutional. The judgment reinforced the principle established by the Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney case, asserting that any deviation from this limit must be justified by extraordinary circumstances, which the Bihar government had not adequately demonstrated.

**2. Lack of sufficient justification:** The High Court found that the Bihar government had failed to provide sufficient justification for the proposed increase in the reservation quota. The court noted that while the caste survey data indicated socio-economic disparities, it did not constitute the extraordinary circumstances required to surpass the 50% ceiling. The court underscored the necessity for a compelling rationale to validate such a significant policy change, which was absent in this case.

**3. Balancing affirmative action with equality and Meritocracy:** The court emphasized the importance of balancing affirmative action with the principles of equality and meritocracy. While acknowledging the need for policies to address historical injustices and promote social equity, the court stressed that these measures must align with constitutional mandates. The judgment highlighted the potential adverse effects of excessively high quotas, such as undermining the competitive spirit and efficiency in public employment and education.

The Patna High Court's ruling underscores the complexities of implementing reservation policies within the framework of constitutional law. By scrapping the Bihar government's 65% quota hike, the court reinforced the constitutional limitations on affirmative action measures, particularly the 50% ceiling established by the Supreme Court. The judgment also highlighted the necessity of providing sufficient justification for any deviations from this limit, ensuring that policies aimed at promoting social





justice do not infringe on fundamental rights and the principles of equality and meritocracy. As the Bihar government prepares to challenge this ruling in the Supreme Court, the case continues to spark a broader debate on the balance between social equity and constitutional principles in India.

#### **Political Repercussions**

The High Court's decision is a major setback for Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who has been a strong advocate for increasing reservations to address social inequities. The ruling challenges his administration's efforts to promote social justice through enhanced quotas and may impact his political standing, particularly among the backward classes and other marginalized communities who were the intended beneficiaries of the quota hike.

In response to the verdict, the Bihar government has announced plans to appeal to the Supreme Court. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar reiterated the need for higher quotas based on the socio-economic realities of the state, arguing that such measures are crucial

for ensuring fair representation and uplifting disadvantaged groups.

#### **Broader implications**

The Patna High Court's ruling has significant implications for reservation policies across India. If the Supreme Court upholds this decision, it could reaffirm the 50% ceiling on reservations, compelling other states to re-evaluate their policies. On the other hand, a reversal by the Supreme Court could pave the way for increased flexibility in reservation policies, allowing states to tailor their approaches based on local socio-economic conditions.

The judgment has also sparked a wider debate on the balance between social justice and constitutional principles. While affirmative action is widely recognized as essential for addressing historical injustices, maintaining a balance with meritocracy and equality under the law remains a contentious issue.

#### **Conclusion**

The Patna High Court's decision to scrap the Bihar government's 65% reservation policy in jobs and education marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing discourse on affirmative action in India. As the state government prepares to challenge the ruling in the Supreme Court, the nation watches closely, anticipating a judgment that could potentially redefine the future of reservation policies and their role in promoting social justice.

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# Message of Lok Sabha election: SCs can't be neglected

Satyajit

**The 2024 Lok Sabha election has sent a loud and clear message that no party can afford to neglect SC communities. Reserved constituencies for SC have shown that they could play decisive role in determining the political course. Had BJP performed well in reserved constituencies, it would not have to depend upon other political parties to form the government.**

For the past one decade, the community of political pundits has found itself in a serious awkward situation as its predictions always went haywire as against in the past. For many, the emergence and strengthening of the Modi phenomenon and the rise and rise of the BJP was unexpected. They came out with some theories behind the changing political landscape of India but all of them were framed in traditional perception, which was mainly based on the role of caste factor in Indian politics. Political parties, which have been using caste planks for their survival, were in deep trouble and were seen fighting for their survival.

However, the major reason behind BJP's rise was never considered seriously. Firstly, Modi's popularity had hardly any barriers like caste, language and region. Modi stands as the biggest symbol of changing the Indian psyche. This helped BJP to emerge as the most powerful political party of not only India but even in the world. Secondly, the performance and delivery of the Modi government took BJP beyond traditional boundaries. A large number of people from deprived classes, benefitted from various welfare schemes, pushing behind caste considerations. Thirdly, BJP took systematic efforts to expand its social base and tried to bring marginalized people under the umbrella of Hindutva. This experiment was a success story for BJP as it continued its march almost for a decade.







Situation changed so dramatically that a few political pundits described the emergence of a new vote bank in Indian politics. This new emergence was described as 'beneficiary class', wherein caste had no space. This theory was further substantiated during elections for Assembly in various results.

However, the 2024 Lok Sabha election marked a deviation from the trend, which was experienced in the Modi era. In 2019, BJP had won 91 reserved seats out of 156. As against this, non-BJP parties secured 57 reserved seats in 2019. In other words, 91 reserved seats played a major role in crossing the 300 mark for BJP. BJP's performance in 2019 was spectacular as reserved seats constituted almost one third share in total strength of BJP.

In 2024, BJP and non-BJP parties seem to have swapped their positions. BJP bagged 57 reserved seats while non-BJP parties (INDI alliance bagged 93 reserved seats. This was a major but the most significant trend as BJP lost in 31 reserved seats, reserved for SC. Remember, this is the number which would have helped BJP to form the government on its own strength, without seeking any help from other political partners. This was the most serious loss for BJP, which the party needs to address.

BJP's loss can be seen from the share of votes as well. In 2019, BJP secured 41 per cent votes among SCs as against 36 per cent in 2024. As against this, non-BJP parties gained 46 per cent votes of SC while it had secured 28 per cent in 2019. In other words, a loss of five per cent had a massive impact on BJP performance while a rise of 18 per cent gave rich dividends to the INDI alliance. In Uttar Pradesh, which played a decisive role in two consecutive victories for BJP, the party lost the majority of reserved seats. However, there is a major difference between BJP and other political parties. BJP tried to bring all the castes under the umbrella of Hindutva while non-BJP parties always tried to encourage caste-based politics. Non-BJP parties seem to have gained limited success in their strategy to weaken Hindutva at least for this moment. One has to remember that BJP continues to be a force in SC reserved constituencies as it continues to have one third of total reserved seats.

What went wrong with BJP, which ultimately resulted in gains for the INDI alliance, is the most discussed question in post-election days. BJP gave the slogan of 'ab ki bar char sau paar' a few months before the election. It might have been coined to boost the cadre, which several feel, had become complacent and overconfident. But the slogan boomeranged

for the party. Opposition camp made a serious election issue of this slogan saying that BJP wanted to change the constitution. BJP tried to counter this propaganda. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated on several occasions how the constitution was sacred for the nation and the question of changing the constitution did not arise. BJP countered the INDI alliance by reminding that it was Congress, which amended the constitution for maximum times. (Out of 106 amendments 80 were introduced by the Congress regime). BJP also reminded the voters how Congress ill-treated Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, architect of constitution. However, opposition was more aggressive to run this hashtag, which proved beneficial for INDI alliance. INDI alliance definitely succeeded in creating fear psychosis among the voters, particularly SC communities, which have sentimental relationship with the constitution.

**The 2024 election has sent a very loud and clear message that no party can afford to neglect SC communities. SC communities constitute 17 per cent of the population, which will play a crucial role in the formation of the government. According to rough estimates, India has around 150 Lok Sabha constituencies, where SC voters are dominant. In the current election, 93 seats were bagged by INDI alliance while BJP secured 57 seats.**

INDI success in reserved seats underlined the fact that the constitution has a very special place among SC communities. SC communities have deep and great faith as they believe that Indian constitution emancipated them from age old caste discrimination. They believe that the constitution ensured them all human rights. Ground reports suggest that several SC community citizens voted for the INDI alliance for the first time because of this fear of psychosis.

The other significant factor that emerged from the election is that parties, which were not part of either NDA or INDA lost more support among the SCs. Political parties like BSP, led by Mayawati, proved non-starters in this election. This space was occupied by INDI



Mallikarjun Kharge



Jitan Ram Manjhi



Chandrashekhar Azad



Virendra Kumar

alliance, particularly by Congress. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge belongs to the SC community, which might have helped the party to regain the confidence of SC voters. Congress partially succeeded in regaining the confidence of SC communities in this election.

The non-NDA and non-INDI parties lost 12 per cent support among the SCs voters this time. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the INDIA group had less support among SCs than the NDA and others. However, in the 2024 Lok Sabha, INDIA received the highest share (almost half – 46 per cent) of the SCs votes. In many reserved constituencies, Congress was locked against BJP in a straight fight and Congress won the majority of the seats there. Failure of non-INDI and non-BJP parties in winning reserved seats, underlines a fact that fear of change in constitution made a deep impact on the voters' psyche.

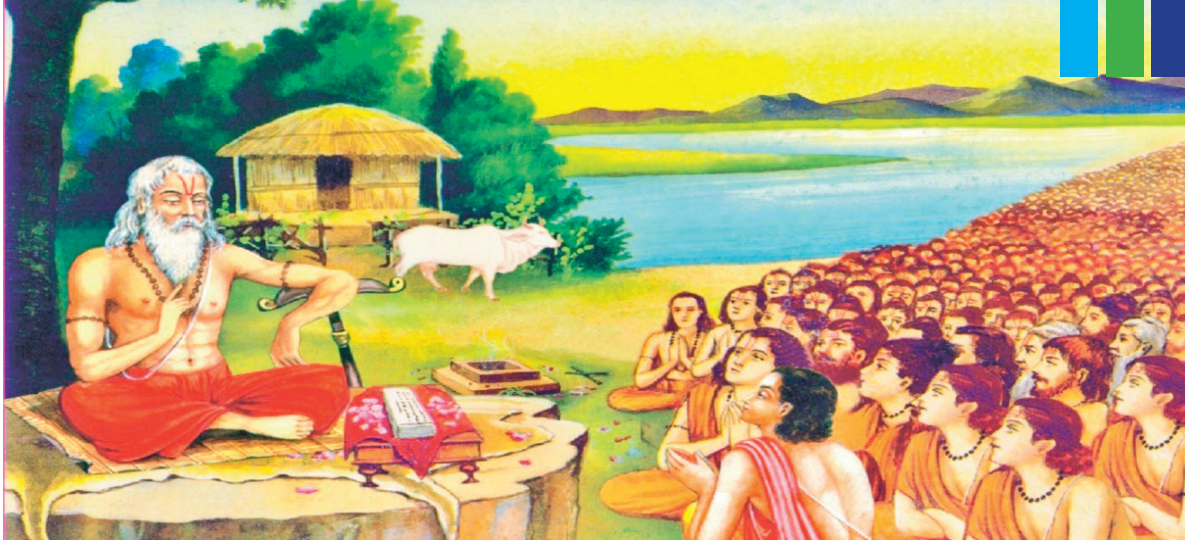
The 2024 election has sent a very loud and clear message that no party can afford to neglect SC communities. SC communities constitute 17 per cent of the population, which will play a crucial role in the formation of the government. According to rough estimates, India has around 150 Lok Sabha constituencies, where SC voters can change the swing. In the current election, 93 seats were bagged by INDI alliance while BJP secured 57 seats.

The election has focused another angle, which is unfortunately not discussed adequately. In several constituencies, a strategic alliance between SC communities and minorities was a strong undercurrent. The aim of this strategic

alliance was obvious. But all the stakeholders of this alliance have different intentions with a common agenda to defeat BJP. This new trend is a matter of serious concern. SC communities ought to remember that this trend is not in their long-term interests. Minority communities have been demanding reservation for a long time. This demand is likely to have a stronger voice in the changed political scenario. SC communities also ought to remember an immediate threat, which involves reservation. Converted minorities, who previously belonged to SC communities, are pushing a demand for reservation. Reservation for converted minorities, who were earlier SCs, will lead to drastic change in social and demographic change, which will be never in the national interests. Reservation is exclusively meant for those people of Hindu community, who were handicapped by untouchability. The question of reservation to convert people does not arise as two Abrahamic religions – Islam and Christianity – never believe in untouchability and caste system. In addition, interests of SC communities will be in serious jeopardy if reservation is allotted to the converted population. Religion based reservation was never discussed in the constituent assembly. Historically also, reservation is meant only for Hindu community. Another strong message of the 2024 election, therefore, is that we have certain issues, which need to be seen beyond electoral considerations and with absolute perception of national interest.

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# British archives show hidden facts on education


Prof Dharmapala was an Indian historian, freedom fighter and Gandhian thinker. He was born in the year 1922 in Shamli district of today's Uttar Pradesh. He is known for his seminal book *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century* (1983) where he has given us the picture of Indian education system before the British takeover of India. He thoroughly studied the documents and surveys conducted by Britishers during their stay in India. These documents and surveys reveal astonishing data which challenges the already established narrative that the Indian society was backward and it had no independent system of its own. In this book he has given the district wise data of schools in British occupied precedencies. In this article I have dealt with only selected districts from Madras Presidency. Similar kind of data is available for Bengal and Sikh Presidency. He particularly focused on the caste wise breakup of students learning in those schools. This area also challenges the established narratives that the education was restricted to only one particular group. The sole aim of this article is to awaken the curiosity of the reader into this matter and give a different perspective of looking towards Indian society.

Rushikesh

We, the people of India, have always been in a state of war. We have been fighting foreign forces for the last 3000 years. In the ancient period, we fought against the Greeks. In the medieval period, we fought against Persians, Turks, Afghans and Iranians. In the modern era, we fought against Britishers. Now, in the 21st century, we are fighting against narratives. Narratives whose very base is built upon the foreign understanding of Indian society. We cannot ignore the fact that every entity that came to conquer us tried to disrupt the very fabric of Indian society in their own way. This

disruption of Indian society gave birth to many destructive narratives that are still embedded in the minds of the Indian masses. Among many such narratives, there is one famous narrative that access to education was restricted to a certain group of people in Indian society.

Once I came across a small video clip where a famous and reputed teacher from a famous civil services coaching institute was telling his students that a certain group of people denied access to education to another group of people for nearly 5000 years. The audience in front of him were the future government officers. The



fact that no one tried to confront him tells us the severity of this narrative. Now let's look at this narrative from a realistic perspective. Is it really possible to deny access to education to certain groups of people in society for 5000 years? To keep one group subjugated for such a long period, you need a tremendous amount of power. Where history is littered with the ruins of empires, who thought themselves to be imperishable and invincible, it would be foolhardy to think that such a system existed for 5000 years. If this is the case, then what's the reality of this narrative? If you read Indian history, you'll come across the names of foreign

**The access to education was not restricted to certain sections of the society only. It is yet another fabricated lie about Indian society. If one reads the surveys of other districts in the presidency and also the data about other presidencies, then he will realise that it was a great British plan of reducing this beautiful tree of Indian education into mere bonsai.**

travelers, who have left their travel accounts. Those travel accounts give us a picture of Indian society, polity, economic system, and education system in that particular period. The fact that they have mentioned the names of universities like Nalanda, Takashia, Odantapuri, and Vikramsheila, existed in India, is a matter of pride for every Indian. Similar kinds of records were also maintained by Britishers. They were not just travel accounts, but extensive surveys of the Indian education system. But Britishers had no intention of just keeping those records in their libraries or singing the praise of the rich and beautiful Indian education system. Well, they had some other plans. Till the year 1800 the British had already established their sway over the Madras and Bengal presidency. These presidencies were divided into districts. They had assigned one revenue collector for every district. East India Company entrusted them with the duty of conducting surveys of Indian schools, colleges and libraries in their respective districts. British collectors conducted a survey of the Indian education system in their respective districts and reported all this data to the British

East India Company.

British officers surveyed every school, college, and Private tuition in their respective districts. It is a very well-known fact that Indian society was categorized into four Varnas. While conducting surveys, they also recorded the number of students in schools and colleges according to their varna. Along with that, the data of students belonging to the other Varnas was also taken into consideration. To one surprise this data reveals that the number of Shudra students in each district was more than the number of students belonging to Brahmin, Vaisha, and Kshatriyas.

As mentioned above, Britishers had conducted surveys of madras and Bengal presidencies. The then Madras presidency was divided into 21 districts. Extensive data regarding the education system in those districts is available. But here I chose to deal with the data of ten districts only. J. Sullivan, the district collector of Coimbatore submitted his report on 23 November 1822. According to his reports, it was a flourishing district with 763 schools and 173 colleges. Coimbatore also had a large number of Shudra students. There were 6461 Shudra students (including 82 females). On the other hand, there were only 918 Brahmin students. In addition to this 289 Vaishya and 226 students belonging to other castes were also there.

Collector J. F. Lane submitted his report on the Masulipatnam district on 3 January 1823. He has given the records of about 484 schools and 49 colleges in that district. Those 484 schools had 1692 Brahmin, 1108 Vaishya, 1507 Shudra, and 499 students belonging to other castes. District collector of Madurai R. Peter submitted his report on 5th February 1823. According to his report, Madurai had 844 schools. Surprisingly the number of Shudra students in this district is more than the number of Brahmin and Vaishya students combined. There were 1186 Brahmin and 1119 Vaishya students. On the other hand, there were 7312 Shudras (including 65 female students) students. Along with these students, 3017 students were also there who came from other castes. Collector J Smith on 14th April 1823 submitted his report on Vishakhapatnam district. He describes the presence of altogether 914 schools in this district. There were 4547 Brahmin students in those schools. But simultaneously 983 students from the Vaishya community, 2072 students including 73 female students from the Shudra community, and 2026 students including 131 females belonging to other castes were also present in those schools.





The collector of Nellore T. Fraser Submitted his survey of Nellore District on 23rd June 1823. According to his report, there were 804 schools in Nellore District. Among those 804 schools, 632 were Hindoo schools and 83 were Vedic schools. Along with these schools, 15 law schools were also there. All these schools had 2466 Brahmin, 1642 Vaishya, 2462 Shudra (including 55 female students), and 432 students from other castes studying there.

According to the report submitted by collector J.C. Whish On 9th July 1823, the district of Guntur had altogether 574 Schools. Along with 3094 Brahmin students, 1578 Vaishya, 1960 Shudra including 37 females and 832 Students belonging to the other caste were studying there.

J. Vaughan the district collector of Malabar submitted his report on 5th August 1823. Malabar had 759 schools. Just like Madurai and Coimbatore Malabar also had a high number of Shudra and students belonging to other castes studying there. There were 4404 Shudra students including 707 female students. Along with Shudras, there were 97 Vaishya and 3099 students (including 343 females) belonging to other castes were studying there.

Revenue collector F.W. Robertson submitted his report on Rajahmundry District. There were 291 schools and 279 colleges in this district. In those 291 schools, there were 907 Brahmin, 653 Vaishya, 472 Shudra, and 574 students belonging to other castes were enrolled. In 279

colleges, there were 1449 Brahmin students and 5 students belonging to other castes were studying there. Surprisingly there aren't any Vaishya or Shudra scholars in these colleges.

Revenue collector P. R. Cazalet submitted his report on Ganjam district on 27 October 1823. Ganjam had altogether 255 schools. Those 255 schools were providing education to 808 Brahmins, 243 Vaishya, 1003 Shudras, and 896 students belonging to other castes.

On 7 November 1823, Collector J.B. Huddleton submitted the reports about Tirunelveli district. According to him, there were 607 schools in this district where 2026 students from the Brahmin community, 2889 students from the Shudra community, and 3674 students (including 117 females) belonging to other castes were studying together.

Thus, the surveys of these districts clearly tell us that the access to education was not restricted to certain sections of the society only. It is yet another fabricated lie about Indian society. If one reads the surveys of other districts in the presidency and also the data about other presidencies, then he will realise that it was a great British plan of reducing this beautiful tree of Indian education into mere bonsai. I believe that dedicated reading of such pre-colonial documents about Indian society will help us to bust more narratives like this.

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# Hindu Dalits in Pakistan: A Minority Among Minorities

Hindu Dalits in Pakistan, often termed as a minority within a minority, endure significant hardships and atrocities. Representing one of the most marginalized groups in Pakistani society, their struggles encompass identity, social justice, and political representation.

Hindu Dalits, predominantly located in the Sindh province, form a substantial portion of the Hindu community in Pakistan. Estimates suggest that Pakistan has approximately 3.5 million Hindus, with a large number being Dalits, primarily belonging to the Meghwar, Kolhi, Bheel, and other oppressed castes. Despite this considerable number, their presence and plight often remain overlooked in both national and international discourses.

Historically, Hindu Dalits in Pakistan have faced systemic discrimination and social ostracization. Post-partition, the vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar highlighted the perils of Dalits in a newly formed Islamic state. Ambedkar,



a staunch critic of the partition, foresaw the challenges Dalits would face in Pakistan. Conversely, Jogendranath Mandal, another prominent Dalit leader, supported the idea of Pakistan, hoping it would provide Dalits with better opportunities and rights. However, Mandal's subsequent return to India in 1950 underscored the harsh reality of Dalit life in Pakistan, proving Ambedkar's apprehensions correct.

The daily lives of Hindu Dalits in Pakistan are marred by poverty, lack of education, and limited access to healthcare. They are frequently subjected to bonded labor, particularly in the agricultural and brick kiln sectors. Reports indicate that a significant number of Hindu Dalit women and children are trapped in cycles of debt bondage, exacerbating their vulnerability and exploitation.

Religious discrimination further compounds their plight. Hindu Dalit women are particularly susceptible to abduction, forced conversion, and marriage to Muslim men. According to a report by The Scroll, hundreds of cases of

forced conversions are reported annually, with a substantial number involving young Dalit girls. The legal and social systems often fail to protect these victims, perpetuating a culture of impunity.

Politically, Hindu Dalits are grossly underrepresented. The Pakistani political framework, while ostensibly democratic, does little to ensure fair representation for Dalits. Reserved seats for minorities often go to the upper-caste Hindus, sidelining Dalit voices. The electoral process and political parties seldom address Dalit issues, leaving them disenfranchised and politically impotent.

Hindu Dalits grapple with a dual identity crisis. On one hand, they face caste-based discrimination within the Hindu community, and on the other, they endure religious persecution in a predominantly Muslim country. This unique intersectionality places them at the bottom of the social hierarchy, struggling for recognition and dignity.

Culturally, Hindu Dalits strive to preserve their traditions and religious practices amidst an environment of hostility and coercion. Many Dalit families live in fear of their cultural identity being eroded or forcibly assimilated. Despite these challenges, Dalit communities endeavor to maintain their distinct cultural heritage through festivals, rituals, and communal gatherings.

Economically, Hindu Dalits are among the poorest in Pakistan. Lack of land ownership, inadequate education, and limited employment opportunities hinder their economic advancement. Many Dalit families are confined to menial jobs, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and marginalization.

Educationally, Dalit children face severe barriers. Discrimination in schools, coupled with financial constraints, results in high dropout rates and limited access to higher education. This educational disenfranchisement stymies upward mobility and reinforces social inequalities.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's foresight regarding the plight of Dalits in Pakistan has proven to be tragically accurate. Ambedkar did not support the idea of Pakistan, anticipating the marginalization and persecution Dalits would face in an Islamic state. His concerns about the lack of constitutional safeguards and social justice for Dalits in Pakistan have materialized over the decades.



The struggles of Hindu Dalits in Pakistan underscore the systemic injustices faced by one of the most vulnerable communities. Their fight for identity, social justice, and political representation continues amidst a backdrop of severe discrimination and violence. The vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who foresaw the challenges of Dalits in Pakistan, stands vindicated, while the tragic trajectory of Jogendranath Mandal

serves as a poignant reminder of the unfulfilled promises and persistent struggles of Hindu Dalits in Pakistan.

Addressing the plight of Hindu Dalits requires concerted efforts from both national and international actors to ensure their rights, dignity, and opportunities for a better future.

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## Justice Chandru Committee recommends removal of caste names from Tamil Nadu Schools

The Justice K Chandru committee, formed in response to the brutal attack on a Dalit student by his classmates in Tirunelveli, has proposed several measures to eradicate caste-based discrimination in Tamil Nadu's educational institutions. Key recommendations include the removal of caste prefixes from school names and attendance registers, implementing a strict Code of Conduct for teachers and students, and the appointment of School Welfare Officers and counsellors. The committee also advised prohibiting students from displaying caste markers such as colored wristbands, rings, or forehead marks, and advocated for the establishment of central kitchens for school meals to replace individual school kitchens.

In the long term, the committee suggested enacting special legislation to enforce social inclusion and enhance local bodies control over primary education, granting them true autonomous powers. It also recommended forming a Social Justice Monitoring Committee to oversee curriculum reforms and ensure the promotion of social justice values. Other proposals include the periodic transfer of teachers to prevent caste dominance, the creation of a Social Justice Students Force, and strict alphabetical seating arrangements in classrooms. These measures aim to create a more inclusive and harmonious educational environment across the state.

## Karnataka: Committee to Support Dalit entrepreneurs

On June 21, Karnataka's Minister for Large and Medium Industries, M.B. Patil announced the formation of a high-level committee led by Industry Department Secretary S. Selvakumar to address challenges faced by Dalit entrepreneurs in the state. This decision was made during a meeting with the Karnataka Dalit Entrepreneurs Association, chaired by Rajya Sabha member L. Hanumantaiah. The minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to allocating 24.10 percent of industrial plots to Dalit entrepreneurs, in line with established guidelines, and disclosed that 391 acres of land have been designated for Scheduled Caste industrialists.

In response to appeals from industrialists, Patil extended the moratorium on project implementation and payments for beneficiaries who were allotted plots before the Covid pandemic from one year to two years. He also emphasized that 25 percent of unused plots in older industrial zones will be reserved for Scheduled Caste industrialists.

## NCSC notice to Karnataka over diversion of funds

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) issued a notice to the Karnataka government on July 10, regarding allegations of diverting funds from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Sub-Plans (SCSP-STSP) to finance its five guarantees scheme. This move, which has sparked controversy, was highlighted by the Opposition BJP, claiming misuse of over Rs 14,000 crore earmarked for SC and ST development. While the Congress government maintains that the funds will still benefit SC and ST communities, critics argue it constitutes diversion. The NCSC has requested a detailed report on the issue within seven days.

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# DINVISHESH

**A**nna Bhau Sathe was a prominent Marathi writer, poet, social activist, and folk artist from Maharashtra, India. He was born on August 1, 1920, in Wategaon, Maharashtra, and passed away on July 18, 1969. Anna Bhau Sathe belonged to the Dalit community and is celebrated for his contributions to Marathi literature, especially through his works that depicted the lives and struggles of the oppressed and marginalized sections of society. He wrote novels, short stories, and poems that highlighted the social issues faced by Dalits and other marginalized communities. His writing style was marked by its simplicity and directness, making it accessible to a wide audience. Anna Bhau Sathe was also a talented folk artist and musician. He composed and performed songs in the form of powadas (ballads) that narrated stories of resistance, social justice, and the lives of the downtrodden. His music continues to be influential in Maharashtra's cultural landscape. Beyond his literary and artistic contributions, Anna Bhau was actively involved in social activism. He advocated for the rights and dignity of Dalits and other oppressed communities, using his platform as a writer and performer to bring attention to their struggles.

## Remembering Anna Bhau Sathe



**18th July**

Anna Bhau Sathe Death Anniversary &  
1st August Birth Anniversary



**18th July**

Sant Namdev  
Death Anniversary



**31st July**

Uddham Singh  
Death Anniversary



**13th August**

Ahilyabai Holkar  
Death Anniversary

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