

UNHEARD VOICES®



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NO TO LATERAL ENTRY

The NDA government led by Narendra Modi finally asked the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to cancel its advertisement for lateral entry into bureaucracy. This was officially communicated by Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances, Jitendra Singh to UPSC. Some constituents of NDA were upset with the decision on lateral entry but while scrapping the decision, Modi rightly said that any government decision needs to align with the principle of social justice. However, it is also fact that the government succumbed to public pressure.

August 18 advertisement was to recruit officials for multiple roles in certain central ministries through lateral entry on a contract basis. The recruitment was to be done across 24 ministries, including 10 joint secretary and 35 director/deputy secretary posts. The advertisement triggered protests. The reason was obvious – lateral entry does not have reservation, which ensures more social representation, accommodation and inclusivity. While political parties are entitled to exploit the issue for their own objectives, it is a welcome sign that the government sensibly listened to the sentiments of the stakeholders and acted in the right direction. It showed its commitment toward the principle of social justice.

Under lateral entry, officials are recruited from outside the usual bureaucratic setup for certain posts in government departments. This may include recruitments for mid- or senior-level positions in services such as the Indian Administrative Service. This practice was introduced in the late fifties, which continued to be uninterrupted. We have several examples of lateral entry since independence and some of them rose to the top most positions in the hierarchy. Let us be fair and admit this

reality. Issues like lateral entry needs to be seen, leaving aside political perception as it is fundamentally a social problem. We ought to remember all the time that social justice has been our guiding principle, which is categorically mentioned in the constitution. Government, irrespective of its ideology, is expected to practice this principle. In the case of lateral entry, issue of reservation is involved. Considering complications of the social issue, any decision on lateral entry is bound to have social impact, which creates public perception about the government. Public perception is crucial in democratic set up and is directly related to acceptance to the government. Consideration of public perception and sentiments, therefore, is always a healthy sign of democracy. Developments, involving lateral entry, show signs of healthy democracy as government changed its decision after considering strong sentiments of the stakeholders.

Recruitment is a policy decision. But any policy decision has to be based on principles, which we have accepted in the constitution. Sometimes, we may come across a situation in which the demand of the circumstances does not match with the principles. In such a situation, we need to steer ourselves by the principles.

Supporters of lateral entry point out that engagement of experts in various fields was necessary for effective, efficient and quality decisions in the bureaucracy. It might be true to some extent. We have already introduced privatization and contractual appointments, wherein reservation has hardly any space. Process of privatization and contractual appointment got accelerated in the nineties when we adopted liberal economy, giving

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up socialism. Why did this happen? Obvious answer is that socialism failed to gain expected fruits. In fact, the then government has to give up the socialistic model under compulsions of the situation. This was the greatest example of limitations of socialist ideology and we should not be shy of discussing it.

In the new model, terms like performance, results, efficiency, management and corporate culture have established themselves in three decades. We have become more business minded, which has no human face. But this situation is not new. We have several examples since independence which show that ideological commitment remains on paper and is never executed at the ground level. This is

a paradox and the situation can be described as 'self-cheating', which is more dangerous in the long term. We need to be honest with ourselves to come out of this tricky situation. The only solution is following our guiding principles. Lateral entry is largely seen as a beginning of abolition of reservation. Such perception is not a good sign. Such perception is bound to have social impact, which may lead the nation into extreme difficulties, posing threat to social harmony. Any development or progress is worthless if we do not have social peace and equality. We are committed to have a social order, which is based on equality and cohesiveness. By scrapping lateral entry, we have reasserted that commitment.

CONTENTS

04 Lateral entry:

A barrier to inclusivity

08 Bridging gap: Educational opportunities for Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu

12 Unacknowledged plight: Systemic challenges & socio-economic disparities of SC/ST in AP

16 Literacy conditions of SC/ST women in Madhya Pradesh

18 Rani Rashmoni: A trailblazer in social reform & education in Bengal

21 Dropouts in Indian higher education institutes

23 Satish Kumar: India's first Dalit Railway Chairman and CEO

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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Lateral entry: A barrier to inclusivity

Lateral entry has its origin in late fifties. We have a series of examples, where individuals recruited through later entry were successful. However, lateral entry process potentially excludes candidates from SC, ST, and OBC backgrounds, who may already face significant socio-economic disadvantages. This could widen the representation gap in government, especially at senior levels where such groups are already underrepresented. Lateral entry, without reservation, perpetuates a system where elite professionals from well-off backgrounds dominate senior government positions, while those from disadvantaged communities continue to be marginalized.

Gandharv



The concept of lateral entry into India's civil services has been a contentious issue. Traditionally, civil servants in India are selected through rigorous examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), which ensures a standardized entry procedure based on merit. However, the lateral entry policy allows professionals from the private sector or specialized fields to enter senior positions in the government without going through the conventional UPSC exam. This policy has sparked significant debate, with many opposing it for several reasons.

Critics argue that lateral entrants might lack the deep understanding of public administration, which the regular IAS officers

gain through years of grassroots work and rigorous training. Since these officers are tested for their knowledge, attitude, and adaptability to public service, bypassing this system might lead to governance challenges.

There are concerns that lateral entry could lead to politicization of the bureaucracy. Since lateral entrants are typically appointed by the government of the day, their loyalty may skew towards the political leadership, rather than maintaining the neutrality expected from civil servants. This could compromise the impartiality and independence of the administration, which is essential in a functioning democracy. Opponents fear that lateral entrants may be used to push political agendas rather than serve



the public interest, eroding the democratic fabric of the civil service.

There have been successful cases of lateral entry into India's civil services, particularly in senior bureaucratic positions. Some notable examples highlight the value that professionals from the private sector or specialized fields can bring to governance.

1. Amitabh Kant held the position of CEO, NITI Aayog between 2016–2022. Although Amitabh Kant is a 1980 batch IAS officer, his appointment as the CEO of NITI Aayog marked a form of lateral entry as it represented a move away from conventional government postings. He was known for his work in tourism, especially the Incredible India campaign, before his leadership role in NITI Aayog. Kant has been instrumental in driving major economic reforms, including Startup India, Make in India, and the promotion of innovation and digital transformation. His leadership in NITI Aayog is seen as a blend of government experience with a progressive approach to economic policy.

2. Rekha Menon held the position of Chairperson, National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) and former private sector leader. She was a former senior leader at Accenture, has been part of the government's advisory committees on multiple occasions, offering expertise in technology and digital transformation. Menon's work with various government advisory roles highlights how lateral entrants with deep private sector experience have helped shape India's digital economy policies and industry regulations.

3. Sanjeev Sanyal is a Principal Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance from 2017 till present. Sanjeev Sanyal is an economist and author with a background in the private sector, including working with Deutsche Bank as a global strategist. His lateral entry into the Ministry of Finance brought new perspectives to economic policymaking. Sanyal has played a significant role in shaping India's economic policies, particularly during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic. He contributed to the Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) economic package, focusing on resilience and local manufacturing. His global financial market experience helped provide fresh insights into India's macroeconomic management.

4. Shri Krishna Gopal Tiwari held the position of Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (2020). Krishna Gopal Tiwari is a forestry professional with expertise in environmental issues. His entry as a lateral appointee was meant to strengthen India's environmental policies and international

climate negotiations. Tiwari's specialized knowledge in forestry and the environment helped the ministry tackle crucial issues related to conservation, biodiversity, and India's stance in climate change negotiations.

5. Raghuram Rajan was a Governor, Reserve Bank of India between 2013 to 2016. A distinguished economist and former Chief Economist at the IMF, Raghuram Rajan was appointed as the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India through a lateral entry. Rajan is widely credited with stabilizing the Indian economy during a period of global financial volatility. His focus on inflation targeting and cleaning up India's banking sector, particularly addressing non-performing assets (NPAs), earned him widespread acclaim. His economic policies helped improve investor confidence and strengthen the financial sector.

6. Manoj Sinha is a Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. A seasoned politician and former Member of Parliament, Manoj Sinha's lateral appointment as the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir is a case of a political professional moving into a key administrative role. Sinha's leadership has focused on stabilizing governance and promoting development in Jammu and Kashmir after its reorganization into a Union Territory. His focus on infrastructure development and addressing security concerns has been praised for bringing relative stability to a region long troubled by conflict.

7. Nandan Nilekani was the Chairperson, Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) (2009–2013). Nandan Nilekani, the co-founder of Infosys, was appointed as the head of the UIDAI, the body responsible for implementing Aadhaar—India's national biometric identification system. Under Nilekani's leadership, Aadhaar became one of the largest biometric ID systems in the world, with over a billion people enrolled. The initiative has since transformed welfare delivery, enabling direct benefit transfers, and improving transparency in government subsidies and services. Nilekani's technical expertise and vision in digital infrastructure were key in making Aadhaar a successful program.

8. Sam Pitroda was the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Public Information Infrastructure and Innovations between 2005 till 2014. Sam Pitroda is a telecommunications engineer and entrepreneur with extensive experience in technology and innovation. He was appointed as an advisor to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to lead India's efforts in information infrastructure. Pitroda is credited with pioneering India's telecom revolution in the



Amitabh Kant



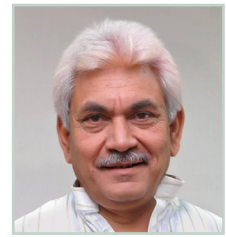
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Sanjeev Sanyal



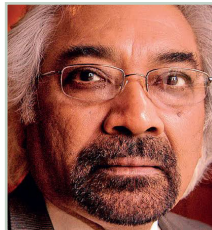
Raghuram Rajan



Manoj Sinha



Nandan Nandkeni



Sam Pitroda



Dr. Manmohan Singh



Montek Singh Ahluwalia

1980s and later, through his advisory role, driving initiatives that laid the foundation for India's Digital India push. His work on the National Knowledge Commission helped in modernizing the country's education and research sectors. His influence on policy frameworks for technology-driven governance has had long-lasting effects.

9. Manmohan Singh, is a renowned economist, did not enter the Indian government through the traditional UPSC route. He had an academic background, with degrees from the University of Cambridge and Oxford. Before entering politics, he worked with international organizations like the World Bank and held several key positions in India's financial and economic institutions. Singh entered government service in 1971 as the Chief Economic Adviser in the Ministry of Finance, and later served in various positions, including Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. He is most known for his role as Finance Minister (1991-1996) under Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, where he introduced landmark economic reforms that liberalized the Indian economy. Singh's tenure as Finance Minister is considered highly successful, as he is credited with steering India away from an economic crisis and initiating reforms that transformed the Indian economy. Later, he went on to serve two terms as the Prime Minister of India (2004-2014).

10. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, also an economist, had a distinguished academic background with degrees from the University of Delhi and Oxford. He initially worked at the World Bank before entering Indian government service. Ahluwalia entered government service in the 1970s, serving in various economic

advisory roles. He held positions in the Ministry of Finance and later became the Commerce Secretary. He is best known for his role as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of India (2004-2014), where he played a key role in formulating India's economic policies during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. Ahluwalia is credited with being one of the architects of India's economic reforms in the 1990s and for driving economic policy planning during his tenure at the Planning Commission. His tenure saw significant progress in areas such as infrastructure development, economic liberalization, and social sector initiatives.

These are the examples of successful lateral entries. However, we can say that these professionals with corporate experience, particularly those working in urban settings. These professionals often come from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, with access to top-tier education and lucrative career opportunities in the private sector. By opening the doors to this group through lateral entry, the government inadvertently creates a system that favors the elite.

While lateral entry aims to bring in professionals from the private sector and specialized fields to senior positions in the government, major point of contention has been the lack of reservation for marginalized communities in the selection process. This has led to strong opposition from various groups, especially those advocating for social justice and affirmative action. the reservation system is a constitutionally mandated tool aimed at ensuring representation and inclusion of historically disadvantaged groups, such as the



Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), in public employment and education. However, the lateral entry process, as it currently stands, does not apply these reservations, which has fueled concerns about inequity and social exclusion.

Without the application of reservation

Lateral entrants might lack the deep understanding of public administration, which the regular IAS officers gain through years of grassroots work and rigorous training. Since these officers are tested for their knowledge, attitude, and adaptability to public service, bypassing this system might lead to governance challenges.

policies, the lateral entry process potentially excludes candidates from SC, ST, and OBC backgrounds, who may already face significant socio-economic disadvantages. This could widen the representation gap in government, especially at senior levels where such groups are already underrepresented. Lateral entry, without reservation, perpetuates a system where elite professionals from well-off backgrounds dominate senior government positions, while those from disadvantaged communities continue to be marginalized. This increases the class and caste disparity within the higher echelons of government, leading to an imbalance in policy-making, which should be inclusive and reflective of all sections of society.

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), which recruits civil servants through a rigorous examination process, applies a reservation system to ensure that candidates from marginalized communities are fairly represented. This ensures that individuals from SCs, STs, OBCs have a pathway to senior government positions. Lateral entry bypasses this mechanism entirely, providing no affirmative action safeguards. The UPSC examination is widely regarded as a merit-based, transparent, and inclusive system that incorporates affirmative action principles. In contrast, the lateral entry process, by not applying reservations, appears opaque and selectively favors those from privileged backgrounds. This raises questions about the fairness and transparency of lateral hiring. Policy-

making in India has significant implications for disadvantaged groups, including SCs, STs, and OBCs. Critics argue that without their active representation in the decision-making process, policies may not adequately address their concerns. Lateral entrants, who often come from corporate or specialized sectors, may lack the ground-level understanding required to formulate policies that cater to the socio-economic needs of these groups. Senior government positions should ideally reflect the diverse demographic of Indian society. However, without reservations, lateral entry could lead to a narrow demographic of leaders, most of whom may come from urban, upper-caste, and upper-class backgrounds. This lack of diversity can negatively impact policy decisions, particularly those related to social justice, welfare, and rural development, which require a deep understanding of the needs and aspirations of marginalized communities.

Lateral entry system seeks to bring in individuals with specialized expertise from the private sector, it fails to recognize that marginalized groups often lack equal access to such opportunities. The educational and economic inequalities faced by SCs, STs, and OBCs mean they are less likely to work in sectors like technology, finance, and management, from which lateral entrants are typically drawn. As a result, lateral entry without reservations creates an uneven playing field, where only the privileged have access to top government jobs.

Conclusion

The lateral entry system, while intended to bring in domain experts and fresh perspectives from the private sector, has been criticized for failing to ensure inclusivity. The lack of reservation in this system is seen as a significant shortcoming, as it effectively excludes marginalized communities from senior government positions. For lateral entry to be a truly effective and equitable tool in governance, it must integrate affirmative action policies, ensuring that individuals from SC, ST, OBC, and EWS backgrounds have equal access to these high-level roles. By applying reservation to the lateral entry process, the government can ensure that it upholds the constitutional values of equality and social justice, while also creating a more diverse and representative administrative structure that better serves the needs of all sections of Indian society.

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Seventy seven years after independence, Unheard Voices takes a look at ground reality, being faced by depressed communities. How is their life? What problems they face? Are they on the path of change? These are some questions, answers to which we tried to find out. We selected a few states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh for the purpose.

Bridging gap: Educational opportunities for Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu

It may be summarized that the educational progress of Scheduled Castes is inadequate. Millions of marginalized SCs are not provided the basic equality of education. There have been specific efforts by central, state governments and voluntary organizations but a lot needs to be done.



Dr. Yuvaraj & Dr. S. Ramprabhu



Despite taking several steps to promote and encourage education, the country felt the need for making education a fundamental right in 2009. We, as a country, are moving towards Universalization of Secondary Education but cannot overlook the existing problems of education at the elementary level. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for Scheduled Castes in India has several implications for achieving universal school education by 2030. Here are some key implications:

- **Primary Education Focus:** While the GER for primary education shows positive results at the all-India level, it is essential to maintain and improve the enrolment rates at this stage. Efforts should be made to ensure all eligible SC children are enrolled in primary schools.

- **Addressing Disparities:** Disparities in enrolment rates across different stages of

education, such as lower enrolment rates in upper primary and secondary education, need to be addressed. Specific interventions and policies should be implemented to bridge these gaps and ensure SC students continue their education beyond the primary level.

- **Focus on Secondary Education:** The lower GER in secondary education suggests that many SC students are not accessing or continuing their education at this level. Attention should be given to increasing enrolment and retention rates in secondary schools.

- **Access to Higher Secondary Education:** The lower GER in higher secondary education indicates that many SC students do not have access to higher education opportunities. Efforts should be made to improve access and participation rates in higher secondary schools, enhancing the prospects of higher education



and skill development for SC students.

- **Regional Disparities:** The analysis of specific states like Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh highlights variations in GER across regions. Addressing regional disparities and providing equal educational opportunities to SC students in all states and regions is crucial for achieving universal school education nationwide.

- **Equity and Inclusion:** Achieving universal school education by 2030 requires a strong focus on equity and inclusion. Policies and initiatives should aim to provide equal opportunities and eliminate barriers SC students face, such as financial constraints, social discrimination, and lack of infrastructure.

- **Monitoring & evaluation:** Regular monitoring and evaluation of GER and other relevant educational indicators are necessary to assess the progress toward achieving universal school education. This will help identify areas that require further attention and guide policy interventions. The GER must be monitored in line with the targeted GER, if any, and corrective measures are to be initiated to bridge the gap between the two.

The GER for Scheduled Castes provides insights into the progress and gaps in achieving universal school education in India. By addressing the implications mentioned above and implementing targeted policies and interventions, India can work towards ensuring that every child, including SC students, has access to quality education by 2030.

Challenges ahead

Achieving universal school education in India by 2030 faces several challenges. Here are some key challenges:

- **Access and infrastructure:** One of the significant challenges is ensuring access to quality education for all children, especially those in remote and marginalized areas. Many rural and economically disadvantaged areas lack adequate school infrastructure, including classrooms, sanitation facilities, and transportation, making it difficult for children to attend school regularly.

- **Socio-economic barriers:** Socio-economic factors such as poverty, child labor, and social discrimination challenge achieving universal education. Many families, particularly from marginalized communities, struggle to afford the costs associated with education, including school fees, uniforms, textbooks, and transportation.

- **Gender disparity:** Gender disparity in education remains challenging, particularly in specific regions and communities. Girls,

especially those from marginalized backgrounds, face barriers such as early marriage, cultural norms, and safety concerns, which hinder their access to and continuation of education.

- **Quality of education:** While increasing enrolment rates is important, ensuring quality education is equally vital. India faces challenges regarding teacher shortages, inadequate teacher training, outdated teaching methods, and limited availability of learning resources. Improving the quality of education across all schools and regions is crucial for achieving meaningful learning outcomes.

- **Dropout rates & retention:** High dropout rates and low retention rates at various stages of education, and transition from Primary to secondary and secondary to higher secondary, pose significant challenges. Lack of interest, poor academic performance, financial constraints, and social pressures contribute to student dropout rates.


- **Inclusive Education:** Ensuring inclusive education for children with disabilities, special needs, and from marginalized communities is a challenge. The education system must be more responsive to diverse learning needs and provide adequate support and resources for inclusive education.

- **Policy implementation & monitoring:** Effective implementation of education policies at the grassroots level is crucial. Coordination between central and state governments, timely allocation of funds, capacity building of educational institutions, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to overcome implementation challenges.

- **Data Collection & analysis:** Timely and accurate data collection and analysis are vital for understanding the progress and challenges in achieving universal education. Improving data collection systems, ensuring data quality, and using data for evidence-based decision-making can help address gaps and monitor progress effectively.

- **Public awareness & participation:** Generating awareness among parents, communities, and stakeholders about the importance of education and their role in supporting children's education is challenging. Encouraging community participation, promoting parent-teacher associations, and involving civil society organizations can improve education outcomes.

- **Financial constraints:** Adequate funding for education, particularly in resource-constrained areas, remains a challenge. Allocating sufficient budgetary resources, optimizing the utilization of funds, and exploring innovative financing



mechanisms are essential to meet the financial requirements for achieving universal education.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional approach involving the government, civil society, communities, and other stakeholders. It necessitates comprehensive policy reforms, targeted interventions, capacity building, and sustained commitment toward ensuring inclusive and quality education for all children in India.

Programs launched for SC children

The Government of India has implemented various programs and initiatives aimed at the welfare and empowerment of Scheduled Caste (SC) children. Here are some notable programs:

- **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):** SSA is a flagship program that aims to provide universal elementary education to all children, including SC children. It focuses on improving school access, quality, and retention by providing infrastructure support, teacher training, free textbooks, and other educational resources.

- **National scholarship scheme for SC students:** This scheme provides financial assistance to SC students to pursue higher education. It includes pre-matric scholarships for students studying in classes 9th and 10th, post-matric scholarships for students pursuing higher education, and merit-cum-means scholarships for students pursuing professional and technical courses.

- **Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatra was Yojana:** This program aims to provide hostel facilities to SC students pursuing higher education. It facilitates their accommodation, food, and other essential amenities to ensure a conducive learning environment.

- **Pre-Matric and Post-Matric hostels:** The Government operates hostels exclusively for SC students at both pre-matric and post-matric levels. These hostels provide a safe and supportive living environment for SC students and help address the challenges of access and retention in education.

- **National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education:** This scheme provides financial incentives to SC girl students to promote their enrolment, retention, and completion of secondary education. It aims to address gender disparities and encourage girls from SC communities to pursue education.

- **National Scheme of Incentives to Scheduled Caste Students for Pursuing Higher Education:** This scheme provides financial incentives to SC students who complete their higher education. It includes a one-time grant and monthly stipends to support their education and encourage them to pursue

higher studies.

- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV):** KGBV is a residential school scheme targeting girls from disadvantaged communities, including SC girls. It focuses on the education and empowerment of girls by providing quality education, vocational training, and life skills development.

- **Post-Matriculation Scholarship for Students with Disabilities:** While not specific to SC children, this scheme provides scholarships to students with disabilities, including those from SC backgrounds. It supports their education at the post-matriculation level and covers various expenses such as tuition fees, maintenance allowance, and other allowances.

These programs aim to address the educational needs of SC children and ensure their equal access to quality education. The government regularly reviews and updates these initiatives to enhance their effectiveness and impact on the education and empowerment of SC children in India.

Schemes for Educational Development of Scheduled Castes

Besides the constitutional provisions, the role of various five-year plans has been underlined for the Nation 's all-round development of disadvantaged groups, in which special provisions for SCs have also been recommended. Some such provisions are: Opening of residential schools/Ashrams, Pre- and Post-matric scholarships, Free textbooks and uniforms, Hostels for girls and boys, Book bank schemes, Upgradation of merit of SC/ST students, Remedial coaching schemes, Grant-in-aid to voluntary organizations and social development programmes for SC girls belonging to low literacy areas.

A Programme with a clear time frame, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has also ensured educational development of SCs through different provisions. The basic emphasis has been given to cent percent enrolment, zero rejection and quality improvement of educational institutions. In this context, the NCF-2005 has stressed on the specific curriculum context to suit the socio-cultural milieu of SC children. Considering different policies, plan and recommendations of committees and commissions, different schemes have been developed from time to time to endorse the Human Rights and constitutional provisions to resolve the educational problems of children from SCs communities. The major schemes like DPEP, Lok Jumbish, Operation Blackboard, Minimum Level of Learning and DPEP, SSA, RMSA, etc. are measures taken for enhancing



the enrolment and quality of education.

Some of the important measures taken under these programmes are as follows: Mid-day meal scheme, Educational Guarantee Schemes and Alternative and Innovative Education, Community Based Monitoring, Interventions of Early Childhood Care and Education, Anganwadi and Balwadi, School and Teacher grant for all teachers, Incentive and Remedial/Coaching Schemes, Inservice Teacher Training, Orientation Programmes and Workshops will be constituted, Grant-in-aids, Vocational education and training for skills development.

The Schemes and programmes for the welfare of Scheduled Castes of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment of Government of India include Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Pre-Matric scholarships, Central scheme of Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship to pursue programmes




of higher education, Centrally sponsored pilot scheme of Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY), Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana, Post-matric scholarship, Pre-matric scholarship for children of these engaged in unclean occupations, top class education for SC children, self-employment scheme for rehabilitation of manual scavengers, Scheduled Castes sub plan, National overseas scholarships, special educational development programmes for Scheduled Castes girls belonging to low literacy areas, upgradation of merits of SC children, free coaching for SC students, National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC). National Safai karmacharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) etc.

Conclusion

It may be summarized that the educational progress of Scheduled Castes is inadequate.

Millions of marginalized SCs are not provided the basic equality of education. There have been specific efforts by central, state governments and voluntary organizations for improving conditions of education of these sections to suffer inequalities in educational opportunities. Economic deprivation, cultural prejudices, social practices and lack of easy access to school, lack of provision of infrastructure, teachers and teaching-learning materials have contributed to the educational backwardness of SCs. Numerous schemes and programmes have been launched for their educational upliftment but the implementation aspect seems to be lacking. As per RTE (2009) Act, all children need to be enrolled in schools (on full time basis). Various provisions and facilities have been made for facilitating their education (with emphasis on increasing their enrolment, reducing their drop rate and bringing them at par with other children in terms of achievement). Teachers have to make conscious efforts to bring all children, including street children and working children, who are out-of-school, to the school. Some of these children might have grown in age and therefore, might feel uneasy to sit with younger children. This could also result in their developing a complex in them. Several national and state level organizations are in the process of developing bridge courses and learning material to help them to be placed in appropriate classes (as per their age) who either remained out of the system or dropped-out due to various reasons. Studies have proved that if there is a mismatch between the curricular expectations and children 's capabilities or the teaching style of teachers does not match with the learning style of students, there is a high probability of such students leaving studies in the middle. We, as teachers, have to make conscious efforts to adapt our teaching styles match with the learning styles and culture of children. In case of scheduled castes, this acquires additional importance as several of them may be first generation learners and may not have educated parents or resources to cope up with the curricular load. Further, it is not enough to formulate policies and programmes only, but also to evolve strategies to neutralize the ideological, structural and familial impediments so that the educational facilities are fully utilized.

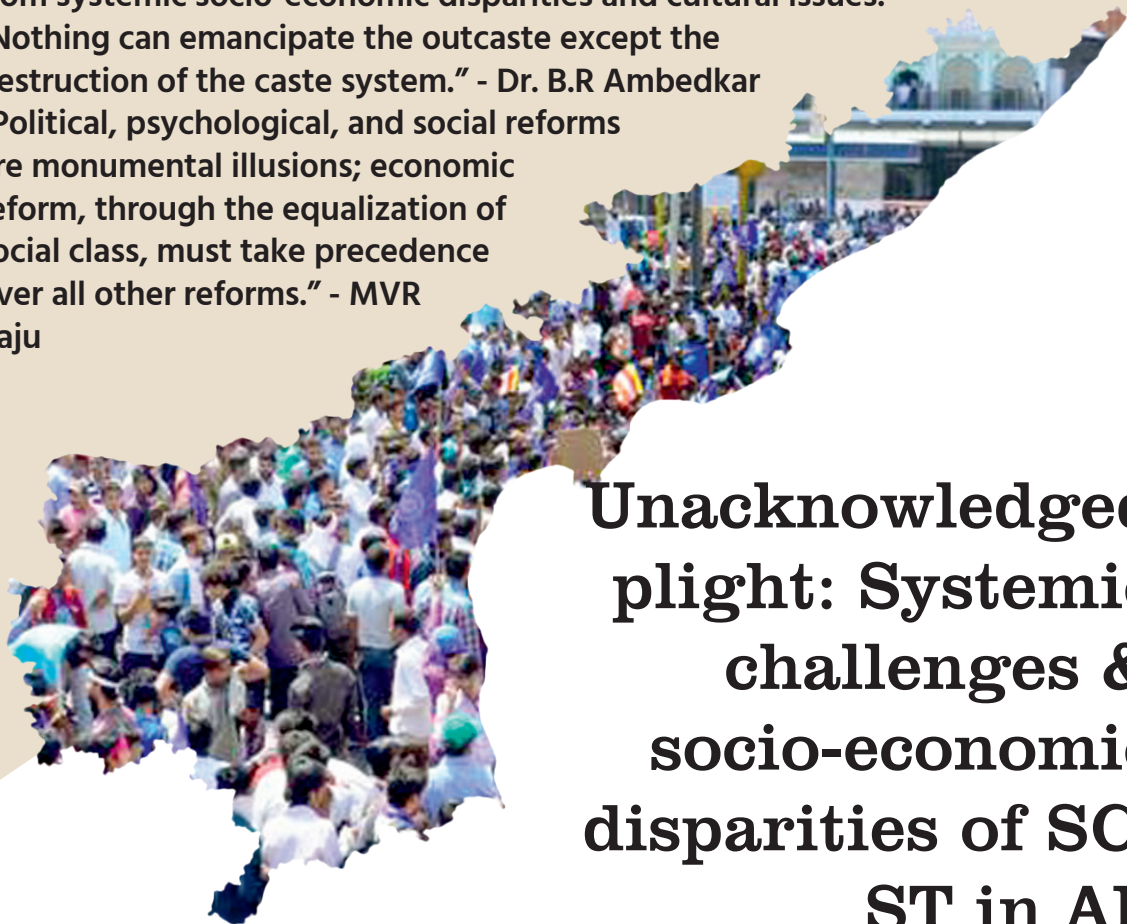
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Severe issues affecting Dalits and Tribals in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana—including farmers and student suicides, ragging, rape, alcohol addiction, and various family problems— highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions. These problems often stem from systemic socio-economic disparities and cultural issues.

"Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system." - Dr. B.R Ambedkar

"Political, psychological, and social reforms are monumental illusions; economic reform, through the equalization of social class, must take precedence over all other reforms." - MVR Raju



Unacknowledged plight: Systemic challenges & socio-economic disparities of SC/ST in AP

Senior Prof. MVR Raju



In Andhra Pradesh, the socio-economic status of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) continues to be marked by systemic challenges and disparities. Despite numerous policies and affirmative actions, SC and ST communities face persistent issues of poverty, educational marginalization, and limited access to healthcare and employment opportunities.

The government has implemented various schemes and programs to uplift these marginalized groups. However, effective implementation and monitoring are crucial to ensure that the intended benefits reach the grassroots level. Community-driven development, improved access to quality education, and healthcare, along with robust

legal protections against discrimination, are essential to address the systemic issues faced by SC and ST individuals in Andhra Pradesh.

Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) represent some of the most marginalized and historically disadvantaged communities in India. These groups have faced centuries of social exclusion, economic deprivation, and systemic discrimination rooted in the deeply entrenched caste system. Despite various legislative measures and affirmative action policies designed to improve their socio-economic status, SC and ST communities continue to struggle with significant disparities in employment, healthcare, housing, income, education, and representation in accredited



positions.

Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are integral to understanding the social fabric and historical context of India. These communities have long been subjected to systemic oppression and exclusion, stemming from the rigid hierarchical structure of the caste system. Historically, SCs, often referred to as Dalits, were considered "untouchables" and relegated to the most menial and stigmatized occupations. STs, comprising various indigenous groups, have also faced marginalization and have often been displaced from their ancestral lands.

Despite the constitutional abolition of untouchability and various protective measures enshrined in Indian law, SC and ST communities continue to face significant socio-economic challenges. Disparities in employment opportunities often confine them to low-paying, informal jobs without security or benefits, perpetuating cycles of poverty and economic vulnerability. Health outcomes for these communities are disproportionately poor, with limited access to quality healthcare services exacerbating mortality rates and other health indicators.

Housing and living conditions for SC and ST families are frequently substandard, lacking essential amenities like clean water and sanitation. These inadequate living conditions further entrench their socio-economic disadvantages. Higher poverty rates among these communities underscore the failures of socio-economic policies and interventions aimed at uplifting them.

Systemic discrimination remains pervasive in education, employment, and social interactions, further entrenching socio-economic disparities. Gaps in policy implementation, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and institutional biases often hinder the effectiveness of government initiatives designed to support SC and ST communities. Political representation for these groups, though constitutionally mandated, remains limited in practice, affecting their ability to influence policies and decisions impacting their lives.

Issues related to land ownership and resource allocation disproportionately affect SC and ST communities, often resulting in displacement and loss of livelihoods. Affirmative action policies, while beneficial to some extent, face significant challenges in implementation, and their outcomes are mixed. Community-led initiatives and success stories highlight the potential for positive

change but also underscore the systemic barriers that persist.

The enduring influence of the caste system and traditional cultural practices continues to marginalize SC and ST communities, restricting their social and economic integration. Issues of identity, self-perception, and societal stigma further compound their marginalization, affecting their self-esteem and social interactions.

Discrimination in Education:

SC/ST children suffer bias in classrooms. A report by the Times of India (2014) titled "They Say We're Dirty: Denying an Education to India's Marginalized," documents discrimination by school authorities in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh against Dalit and tribals. These children are often made to sit at the back of the class or in separate rooms, insulted with derogatory names, denied leadership roles, served food last, and told to clean toilets while children from traditionally privileged groups are not.

Discriminatory practices in education, a high incidence of crimes against SC/ST individuals, and a lack of adequate representation in key sectors further exacerbate their marginalization. Efforts to address these issues, including legislative measures and affirmative action policies, have often fallen short due to implementation gaps and institutional biases.

Denial of Higher Education: Access to quality education remains limited for SC/ST students in Andhra Pradesh, with higher dropout rates and lower literacy levels compared to other communities. A report from The Hindu (2022) notes that Government Order No. 77 was issued to deny fee reimbursement to students from the 2020-21 academic year. Students pursuing PG courses in private, aided, and unaided colleges are not receiving the Jagananna Vidya Deevena benefits, resulting in their inability to continue or join higher education. These educational disparities impact employment opportunities, as lower educational attainment restricts access to higher-paying jobs.

Denial of Primary Education: The Best



Available Schools (BAS) scheme launched in 2008 aimed to encourage meritorious students from SC and ST communities to pursue education from Classes 2 to 8 in private schools by paying their tuition fees. However, issues with the scheme have been reported, leading to continued educational disparities. SC/ST candidates in educational institutions A parliamentary panel report highlighted by the Economic Times (2024) reveals that SC/ST candidates face biased assessments during faculty appointments in educational institutions. These candidates are often deliberately declared 'not suitable' due to prejudiced evaluations, despite the government's claims of insufficient suitable candidates.

Crimes Against SC/ST Communities:

The Hindu (2023) reports a significant increase in crimes against SCs and STs in 2022. A total of 57,582 cases were registered for crimes against SCs, showing a 13.1 percent increase over 2021, and 10,064 cases were registered for crimes against STs, showing a 14.31 percent increase over 2021. A YSR Congress Party representative, a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) of East Godavari district, in May 2022, admitted to committing the crime of murdering his driver, Veedhi Subramanyam, and door delivered his dead body to his home, who was reportedly a

Dalit. Over the past five years, while cases of atrocities against SCs and STs have increased, the conviction rate remains abysmally low, highlighting a significant gap in justice delivery for these communities.

Protection to SC and ST Women: The Times of India (2023) reports that in Andhra Pradesh alone, 650 SC women were assaulted in 2022, reflecting the severe safety concerns faced by women in these communities.

No representation in the judiciary: In Andhra Pradesh, the lack of SC/ST representation in the judiciary reflects broader social and political dynamics in the state. A study by the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSSEIP) at the National Law School of India University noted that while there have been efforts to improve representation in other sectors, the judiciary has lagged behind, particularly in states like Andhra Pradesh where caste dynamics are deeply entrenched (CSSEIP, 2016).

Social and Economic Marginalization:

The Hindu (2023) reports that the YSRCP government in Andhra Pradesh stopped 27 welfare schemes for SCs, affecting their self-reliance and economic improvement opportunities. Ban on recruitment of backlog vacancies: In the G.O. 214, an Ad hoc rule was issued to fill up the backlog vacancies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes



duly waiving the written examination and interviews (Oral tests) for the limited recruitment to be conducted by all recruiting agencies except the Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission and that the selection for such limited recruitment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes be made on the basis of marks obtained in the qualifying academic examinations.

Over 2,000 DSC candidates were given contractual employment. The state government has issued an order giving contract jobs to 2,193 candidates, who passed the 2008 District Selection Committee (DSC). Principal Secretary B Rajasekhar issued the orders stating that the decision is to accommodate the DSC 2008 candidates “as a special case in the exceptional circumstances on humanitarian grounds.” He further said that the decision “shall not be taken as a precedent.”

Housing and living conditions for SC and ST families are frequently substandard, lacking essential amenities like clean water and sanitation. These inadequate living conditions further entrench their socio-economic disadvantages. Higher poverty rates among these communities underscore the failures of socio-economic policies and interventions aimed at uplifting them.

SC Fertile Land Conversion: Dalit community lands in Andhra Pradesh have been forcibly converted into Jagganna Colonies, significantly affecting the livelihoods and economic stability of these communities.

Denial of Contracts and Judicial Representation: SC and ST individuals face exclusion from contracts and representation in the judiciary. There is a lack of SC/ST representation in high courts and among advisors to the government, exacerbating their marginalization and limiting their influence in decision-making processes.

Societal bias and cultural issues

A 20-year-old Dalit youth was tortured by filmmaker Nutan Naidu and his family, highlighting ongoing caste-based violence and discrimination. Human Rights Forum and Dalita Aikya Porata Vedika have demanded enhanced punishment for the perpetrators.

Dr. Ambedkar name controversy: Violence

erupted in Amalapuram, Andhra Pradesh, by dominant castes over renaming the newly formed Konaseema district as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema district. This incident sheds light on the persistent casteism and Dalit assertion in the region.

Conclusion:

The socio-economic landscape for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Andhra Pradesh remains fraught with systemic challenges and disparities despite numerous policies aimed at their upliftment. Persistent issues such as poverty, educational marginalization, inadequate access to healthcare, and limited employment opportunities continue to afflict these communities. Discriminatory practices in education, a high incidence of crimes against SC/ST individuals, and a lack of adequate representation in key sectors further exacerbate their marginalization. Efforts to address these issues, including legislative measures and affirmative action policies, have often fallen short due to implementation gaps and institutional biases. To effect meaningful change, it is crucial to enhance the effectiveness of existing schemes, ensure equitable access to opportunities, and address deep-seated socio-cultural prejudices.

Severe issues affecting Dalits and Tribals in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana—including farmers and student suicides, ragging, rape, alcohol addiction, and various family problems—highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions. These problems often stem from systemic socio-economic disparities and cultural issues. The current policy-making process in India tends to respond reactively to such crises, as evidenced by recent legislative changes like lowering the juvenile age limit following high-profile cases. To address these complex issues more effectively, it is crucial to integrate social scientists, including psychologists, into the policy-making process. Their expertise can help develop proactive and preventive measures that address root causes, reduce suicides, and improve overall well-being at the community level. This approach can lead to more informed, holistic policies that better meet the needs of marginalized populations and address socio-cultural issues before they escalate.

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Literacy conditions of SC/ST women in Madhya Pradesh

The literacy rate in Madhya Pradesh is 70.6 per cent as per the census conducted in the year 2011, while the same was 63.7 per cent in the year 2001. The literacy rate in Madhya Pradesh has increased by 6.9 per cent over the last decade. The census of the year 2011 shows the literacy rates among women and men to be at 60.0 per cent and 80.5 per cent respectively. The census of 2001 showed the female literacy rate at 50.3 per cent and male literacy rate at 76.1 per cent. This means the female literacy rate has shown increase of 9.7 per cent, while the male literacy rate has grown by 4.5 per cent.

Dr. Asha Rani



Adivasi Population is predominant in the State of Madhya Pradesh. The State shares its borders with other States Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. As per the 2011 census, the population of Scheduled Classes in the State is 153.16 Lakh, which is 21.10 per cent of the total population. The social condition of any community can be assessed based on the level of education among its members and their economic conditions. Since the State of

Madhya Pradesh is one of the oldest states carved out after independence, the level of education there is satisfactory. As for the condition of education among members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and especially women belonging to the Scheduled Classes, their education level has improved a lot, thanks to various schemes. The level of education among both girl children and adults has enhanced to a great extent today.

Literacy and education are considered



vital indicators to assess development and progress in any cross-section of society. It is so because they play a pivotal role in human development that makes a great impact on overall social and economic development. Better health and nutrition conditions and economic development can be attained more effectively with a higher literacy rate. Besides, it also plays an important role in more effective population control and expedites the empowering of society in general, especially the weaker sections. The high literacy rate also helps make steady development. Information about the literacy of every individual is obtained during the census because the literacy rate is considered one of the most important social characteristics of the society. Any individual, who has attained the age of seven years or older than that, who can read and write in any language is considered literate for the purpose of the census. An individual who can only read but is unable to write is not considered literate.

Attaining any formal education or passing any minimum educational standard is not a requisite for any individual to be considered as literate. Literacy can be obtained either in adult literacy classes or through any of the informal education systems. Persons who are visually challenged but read in Braille script are also considered literate. All children in the age group of six years or below are considered illiterate, notwithstanding whether the school is attending the school and has acquired the skills to read and write. Children of the age of below five years used to be considered illiterate for the census before the year 1991. However, one cannot attain the capability to read and write without developing the general ability to both understand and read as well as write over the passage of time. Because of this, the decision was taken at the time when the census was being conducted that all children in the age group of 0-6 years shall be considered illiterate in terms of definition and population, and only the people, who have attained the age of seven years or more shall be classified in the categories of literate or illiterate. The same criterion was applied during all censuses conducted in 2001, 2011 and after. Till the year 1991, the literacy rate would be assessed while considering the ratio between the crude literacy rate and the total population during the census. The decision to use the word literacy for the people having attained the age of seven years or more (considering the effective rate of literacy) was taken in the census conducted in the year 1991 while considering that the literacy rate would become more meaningful if the sub-

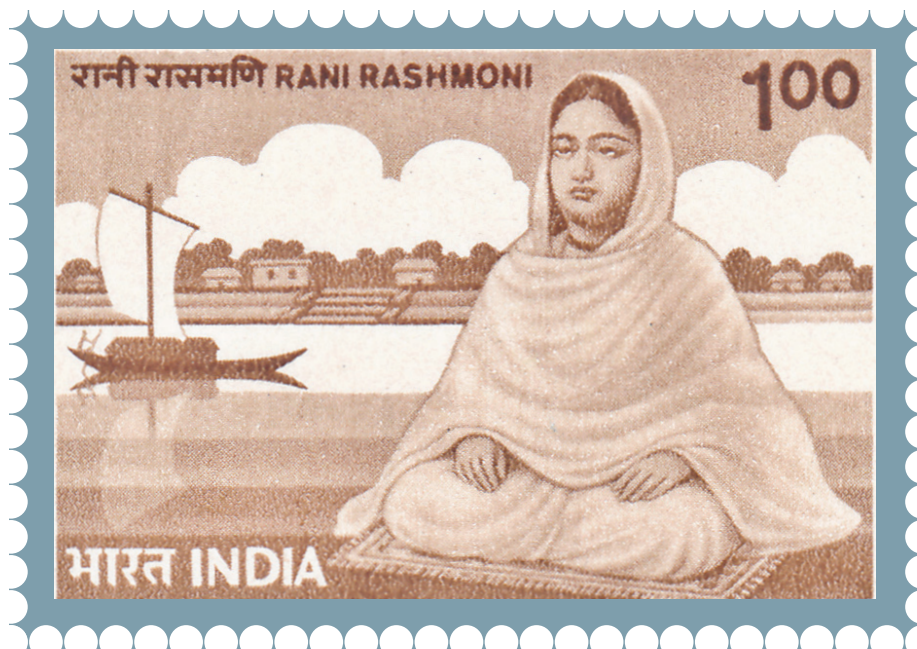
category of children in the age group of 0-6 years is excluded from the population for the purpose. This rule was upheld in the subsequent censuses carried out in the years 2001 and 2011.

The total number of literate people in Madhya Pradesh is 4,38,27,193. This includes 1,79,79,056 females and 2,58,48,137 males, who are literate. The literacy rate in Madhya Pradesh is 70.6 per cent as per the census conducted in the year 2011, while the same was 63.7 per cent in the year 2001. The literacy rate in Madhya Pradesh has increased by 6.9 per cent over the last decade. The census of the year 2011 shows the literacy rates among women and men to be at 60.0 per cent and 80.5 per cent respectively. The census of 2001 showed the female literacy rate at 50.3 percent and male literacy rate at 76.1 per cent. This means the female literacy rate has shown an increase of 9.7 per cent, while the male literacy rate has grown by 4.5 per cent. Madhya Pradesh was placed at 24th rank in the country in terms of literacy in the census carried out in the year 2001, while the state's rank in terms of female literacy decreased to 28th place in the census conducted in the year 2011.

Districts are ranked based on the changes witnessed over the period of one decade from the year 2001 to the year 2011 as well as the literacy rate recorded in the years 1991, 2001 and 2011. Notably, the Narsinghpur district, which enjoyed the first position in the year 2001, has slid down to seventh rank in the year 2011. Similarly, the Raisen district, which was in fifth position in the year 2001, has gone down to tenth rank in the year 2011. On the contrary, conditions in the Balaghat district have improved over the period. The Balaghat district, which was at 13th rank in the year 2001, has risen to 4th rank in 2011. Similarly, Gwalior and Sagar districts, which were at 12th and 14th ranks respectively in the year 2001, attained fifth and sixth position respectively in the year 2011.

Although major development has been witnessed in the class of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, these communities still linger behind other cross sections of the society because attention is not paid towards social, poverty, landlessness, health etc. This is the reason as a consequence of which educational backwardness too prevails as these classes cannot overcome the hurdles, they face in meeting their basic needs. Consequently, there is a striking contrast between their conditions on paper and in reality, on ground zero.

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On the occasion of birth anniversary of Rani Rashmoni, Unheard Voices remembers her contribution to Bengal's cultural, educational, religious and women empowerment aspects.

Rani Rashmoni: A trailblazer in social reform & education in Bengal

Dr. Prodip



Rani Rashmoni Dasi, a notable personality from 19th-century Bengal, stands as a paragon of social reformation and educational advancement. Her enduring influence is evident in the realms of education, women's rights, and religious harmony. Her life's work has etched her name into the annals of Bengal's history, making her an exemplary figure in the struggle for social justice and the upliftment of the marginalized.

Born on September 28, 1793, Rani Rashmoni was not just a wealthy landowner (zamindar) but also a dedicated philanthropist whose contributions to society were vast and multifaceted. As the founder of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, she played a significant role in promoting religious practices while also supporting prominent figures like Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who later became a key spiritual figure in Bengal.

Early Life and Background:

Rani Rashmoni's origins trace back to the

village of Kona, located in the Kanchanapalli region, which is now part of the districts of Nadia and North 24 Parganas in West Bengal. Born into a humble family on September 28, 1793, she was known for her beauty and intelligence from a young age. At just eleven years old, she was married to Babu Rajchandra Das, a prosperous zamindar of Janbazar in Kolkata. This union brought her into the realm of wealth and influence, which she later utilized to champion various social causes.

Rani Rashmoni's personal life was marked by simplicity and devotion. Despite her wealth, she lived as an ordinary, devout Bengali Hindu widow after the untimely death of her husband. She had four daughters—Padma Mani, Kumari, Karunamayi, and Jagdamba—each of whom played roles in continuing her legacy of social service. Following her husband's death, Rani Rashmoni took over the management of the zamindari with remarkable acumen, ensuring



that her vast resources were directed towards the welfare of the people.

Educational Contributions:

Recognizing the transformative power of education, Rani Rashmoni took significant strides to promote literacy and learning, especially among women. In 1849, she established the Bethune School, one of the first institutions in British India dedicated to educating girls. This school was not just an educational institution but a beacon of hope for countless young women who otherwise had limited access to formal education. By providing Western-style education, the Bethune School enabled women to break free from the shackles of societal restrictions, thereby laying the foundation for their social and economic independence. Rani Rashmoni's efforts in the field of education were not confined to girls alone. She also supported the establishment of schools and colleges that catered to the educational needs of boys, understanding that education was the key to societal progress. Her philanthropic endeavours extended to the Hindu College (now Presidency University) and the Imperial Library (now the National Library of India), institutions that have since become pillars of learning and knowledge in India.

Advocacy for religious tolerance:

A devout Hindu by faith, Rani Rashmoni was also a staunch advocate for religious tolerance and harmony. Her support for the Brahmo Samaj, a reformist movement that sought to purify Hinduism by eliminating caste distinctions and ritualistic practices, underscores her progressive views. The Brahmo Samaj, founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, aimed to create a more inclusive society by advocating for social reforms that were ahead of their time. Rani Rashmoni's patronage of this movement illustrates her commitment to social equality and religious inclusivity.

The construction of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, one of her most significant contributions, was not only a religious act but also a social statement. This temple, located on the banks of the Ganges River, became a major pilgrimage site and a symbol of Rani Rashmoni's dedication to her faith. However, her decision to build such a grand temple was also rooted in her vision of creating a space where people from all walks of life could come together, transcending social and religious barriers.

Women empowerment through education and social reforms:

Rani Rashmoni was deeply convinced that education was the most potent tool for empowering individuals, particularly women.

Her efforts in establishing schools for girls were driven by the belief that education would enable women to gain economic independence, assert their rights, and challenge the patriarchal norms that dominated society. Through education, she sought to equip women with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead dignified lives and contribute meaningfully to society.

Beyond education, Rani Rashmoni's contributions to social reform were extensive. She used her influence and resources to address social injustices, such as the oppression of women and the marginalized. Her work in this area was not limited to advocacy; she actively participated in social movements and used her wealth to support causes that aimed to eradicate social evils like child marriage, sati (the practice of widow burning), and the denial of property rights to women.

Defiance Against British Colonial Rule:

Rani Rashmoni's defiance of British colonial policies is another aspect of her legacy that deserves recognition. One notable incident was her resistance to the imposition of water taxes on fishermen by the British authorities. When the fishermen, who relied on the Ganges for their livelihood, faced financial ruin due to these taxes, Rani Rashmoni intervened by paying a substantial amount to the British government and then blocking the movement of ships on the river by pulling iron chains across the waterway. This bold move forced the British to revoke the tax and return the money, highlighting her willingness to stand up against injustice.

Another instance of her resistance occurred when a British indigo planter, or "Nilkar sahib," began oppressing the local people in the Makimpur pargana. Rani Rashmoni took decisive action by funding the construction of the Stoner Canal, which connected the Madhumati River with the Navganga. This canal not only alleviated the suffering of the local population but also demonstrated her commitment to using her resources for the public good.

Dakshineswar Kali Temple and Its Significance:

Dakshineswar Kali Temple, established by Rani Rashmoni in 1855, remains one of her most enduring legacies. The story behind its construction is steeped in spiritual significance. According to legend, Rani Rashmoni had planned a pilgrimage to Kashi (Varanasi) to worship Mother Annapurna and Lord Vishwanath. However, on the eve of her journey, she dreamt that the Goddess Bhavatarini, a form of Kali, instructed her to build a temple on the banks of the Ganges instead of undertaking the pilgrimage. Taking this divine command to heart,



Rani Rashmoni dedicated herself to constructing the temple, which was completed on May 31, 1855, on the auspicious day of Snan Yatra. The temple not only served as a centre for religious worship but also as a symbol of Rani Rashmoni's devotion to her faith and her commitment to the welfare of society. The temple's silver chariot, which she commissioned at a great cost, was used to carry the deity Raghuv eer in grand processions through the streets of Kolkata, further cementing her legacy as a patron of religion and culture.

Social and Cultural Impact:

Rani Rashmoni's contributions to society extended beyond her lifetime. The Durga Puja celebrations at her Janbazar residence in Kolkata became a significant cultural event, drawing large crowds and reflecting her deep-rooted connection to Bengali traditions. Her involvement in these festivities, including the famous incident where she stood up to a British official, who objected to the loud drumming during the Kalabau bath, exemplified her fearless spirit and her willingness to preserve cultural practices in the face of colonial opposition.

Her legacy also includes her efforts to protect and promote Indian cultural heritage. Rani Rashmoni was a patron of the arts, literature, and music, and she supported various cultural activities that enriched the lives of the people. Her contributions in this area helped preserve and promote the rich cultural traditions of Bengal, ensuring that they would continue to thrive for generations to come.

Death and Legacy:

Rani Rashmoni passed away on February 19, 1861, at the age of 68. Her death marked the end of an era, but her legacy continues to inspire countless individuals. Her body was cremated at the Keoratala crematorium in Kolkata, and her memory has been honoured in various ways, including the issuance of commemorative postage stamps by the Government of India on

her birth centenary and the installation of her statue in Curzon Park, Kolkata, on the 200th anniversary of her birth.

Rani Rashmoni's life and work have had a lasting impact on the development of Bengal. She is remembered as a visionary leader who challenged societal norms and paved the way for a more just and equitable society. Her contributions to education, women's empowerment, and religious tolerance have left an indelible mark on Bengal's history, and her story continues to inspire those who seek to make a difference in the world.

Rani Rashmoni's life was a testament to the power of compassion, courage, and commitment to social justice. As a social reformer, educator, and philanthropist, she dedicated her life to the upliftment of the oppressed and the betterment of society. Her legacy as a champion of women's rights, a promoter of education, and a defender of cultural and religious practices remains relevant today, offering valuable lessons for future generations. Her example shows that true leadership is not defined by one's position or wealth, but by the impact one has on the lives of others. Rani Rashmoni's story is a reminder that each of us has the potential to effect positive change in the world and that by standing up for what is right, we can make a lasting difference in the lives of those around us.

As we reflect on her life and achievements, it is clear that Rani Rashmoni was not just a figure of historical significance, but a beacon of hope and a role model for all who strive to create a more just and equitable society. Her legacy lives on, inspiring us to continue the work of social reform and to uphold the values of compassion, justice, and equality in all that we do.

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Dropouts in Indian higher education institutes

Sanket & Pradeep



Students require academic, financial, and social capital to turn themselves into successful professionals. The financial capital, at least for IIT students, is not an issue and will not be discussed in this article. While I have some views regarding the academic capital of all the students, I will limit this article to the discussion of the academic capital of underprivileged students. I believe that the IIT entrance examinations are of a high quality, not prone to any manipulation, and are reasonably good indicators of students' ability to complete the degree program.

Some time ago, I met an alumnus of our college of Engineering Pune - COEP. The first question that one naturally asks an unknown alumnus is about his batch. With a sense of pride, he said that he belonged to multiple batches as he had completed his four-year degree program in eight years. At COEP, we had no early or abnormal exits that I can recall.

While most used to graduate in 4 years, everyone used to graduate sooner or later. I did my post-graduation at an IIT and recall a number of people who had early or abnormal exits, that is - dropouts. As per the latest report, the number of early exits in IIT Bombay is about 30 out of 1,000 students which is 3 percent. While studying the US engineering education system, I found out that they have almost 40 percent of students dropping out in the first year and only 56 percent graduating in four years.

Since the US education system does not have any quota for underprivileged students, their exit data of the underprivileged students cannot be compared with ours. It is worth noting though that while the black population in the US is more than 12 percent, the number of black engineering students is just 4 percent. The US educators are exploring ways to increase the number of black engineers without resorting to a quota system but are not very concerned about the exit numbers. They perhaps feel that the exit statistics indicate a better quality of engineering graduates. In India, the problem is, such exits and delays can yield similar results but are highly stigmatized.





So, we may conclude that the overall problem of dropouts at IIT Bombay, which appeared in the media, is not all that serious. The corresponding exits in underprivileged categories is higher and needs analysis or discussion. Though, the category exit numbers also tend to be much smaller compared to the general numbers of the US universities.

Students require academic, financial, and social capital to turn themselves into successful professionals. The financial capital, at least for IIT students, is not an issue and will not be discussed in this article. While I have some views regarding the academic capital of all the students, I will limit this article to the discussion of the academic capital of underprivileged students. I believe that the IIT entrance examinations are of a high quality, not prone to any manipulation, and are reasonably good indicators of students' ability to complete the degree program. The cutoffs for underprivileged categories are far smaller than open categories, which means that there is obviously a difference between the academic capitals of the two categories at the start of the program. That difference is naturally going to make the academic life of the underprivileged students difficult, resulting in higher abnormal exits.

To counter the situation, IIT Bombay, I understand, has been taking steps of reducing the academic load of students, who have poor academic performance, organizing English classes, and having better performing roommates to poor performing students, which, unfortunately, translates to underprivileged students.

Reducing the academic load is a reactive step and does not help in building students' self-esteem. Partnering with academically superior students may also influence the self-esteem of these students as they continue to struggle, while watching their roommates excelling. The English classes segregate them socially and take their own toll. And this brings us to what I consider is the most important point behind this story – the lack of social capital of these students. They already have low social capital and setbacks in academics reduce the possibility of increasing it. They tend to live in the system as second-class citizens. That doesn't help anyone.

At this stage, I must point out that in IITs, or for that matter almost any educational institute, a common student gives academic and social respect to others based solely on academic and social performances and does not consider the background of the concerned individuals. They,

though, do not ponder on reasons for the poor performances on either front.

The US system has a parallel to our situation. They have black students as underprivileged students. They also have historically black colleges and universities – called HBCU institutions - where the majority of students are black. In the case of STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, 25 percent of black graduates come from HBCU universities, which constitute only three percent of all American universities. Overall, the HBCUs enroll 10 percent of black students and produce 20 percent of black graduates. Therefore, we would like to make a case for separate institutes for underprivileged students which will take care of their social capital deficiency which could in turn help in overcoming academic deficiency. We understand that the Indian dynamics could be different and we cannot follow a system of another country blindly. We, therefore, suggest a rigorous debate on this possibility among all stakeholders. Of course, this solution will not solve the problem completely and we have to look at the mainstream education system to develop academic and social capitals of all underprivileged students.

We believe that every student has certain talents and they should be nurtured by the systems with the help of proper mentoring and social support programs. Of course, one must highlight that it is not so much the details of what the successful programs do than the care with which they do it. This underlines the role and importance of the teaching staff in mentoring and supporting underprivileged students. This is important, as I am not sure if IIT faculty have the time and inclination to work on this aspect while they are busy developing their own careers, which has different yardsticks. To develop academic capital, it may help to start the admission process of underprivileged students early and conduct bridge programs for them before they enter the system. The system can also use technology-based learning which offers flexibility of the pace of learning depending on students' level up competence in that particular area or subject.

Let us now come to a problem at a different level of the story. There is a huge hype in our society about engineering in general and IITs in particular. This hype creates huge parental, societal and peer pressures. Many students blindly choose these career paths without assessing their potential to perform in them.

It will help to take all students - especially the underprivileged ones - through an assessment process to help them **(On page 24)**



Satish Kumar: India's first Dalit Railway Chairman and CEO



Satish Kumar's recent appointment as Chairman and CEO of the Railway Board represents a historic milestone, not just for him personally, but for the entire nation. His ascension to this prestigious role breaks a significant barrier in Indian bureaucracy, marking a transformative shift towards a more inclusive society.

In the sprawling tapestry of India's diverse and vibrant society, few stories shine as brightly as that of Satish Kumar, the newly appointed Chairman of the Railway Board. His appointment marks a pivotal moment in the country's journey towards inclusivity and meritocracy, transcending deep-rooted societal barriers and setting a precedent for future generations.

Satish Kumar's story begins in the heart of India, where the railway lines, symbolic of the nation's connectivity and progress, also narrate the tale of his own remarkable journey. Born into a Dalit family, Kumar's ascent to the pinnacle of Indian Railways reflects not just personal triumph but a broader, transformative shift in Indian society.

His academic journey at the Malaviya National Institute of Technology (MNIT) in Jaipur was an early testament to his resilience and determination. Despite facing the subtle, yet persistent, challenges posed by the remnants of the caste system, Kumar's focus remained unwavering. His pursuit of excellence was not merely about earning a degree but about making a significant impact in his field.

Graduating with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, Kumar joined the Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME) in 1988. Over the past 34 years, Kumar has held


several pivotal roles across different zones and divisions of Indian Railways, bringing innovation, efficiency, and safety improvements to the railway system.

Profile highlights and contributions:

Early Career and Specialized Training: Kumar's career began in March 1988 with postings in the Jhansi Division of the erstwhile Central Railway and the Diesel Locomotive Works (DLW) in Varanasi. He later served in the North Eastern Railway, Gorakhpur, and Patiala Locomotive Works, where he contributed to critical projects that enhanced operational efficiency. His commitment to Total Quality Management (TQM) was solidified through specialized training under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1996. This training shaped his approach to railway management, focusing on continuous improvement and adherence to the highest standards of quality.

Fog Safe Device: One of Kumar's notable achievements is his work on the Fog Safe Device, an innovation critical for ensuring safe train operations during foggy conditions. This device has become indispensable in mitigating risks associated with reduced visibility, particularly in northern India during winter months.

Leadership Roles: From April 2017 to April



2019, Kumar served as the Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of the Lucknow Division on Northern Railway. His tenure was marked by infrastructural developments and the successful management of the Kumbh Mela in 2019, a massive event requiring meticulous planning and coordination to handle the influx of millions of pilgrims. His leadership during this period earned him accolades at all levels of the organization.

Vigilance and Integrity: Before his appointment as General Manager of North Central Railway, Kumar served as the Senior Deputy General Manager and Chief Vigilance Officer on North Western Railway, Jaipur. In this role, he was responsible for overseeing vigilance operations, ensuring transparency, and maintaining the integrity of railway operations.

Recent Roles: On November 8, 2022, Kumar took charge as the General Manager of North Central Railway, Prayagraj, a milestone in his public service journey. Following this, he was appointed as Member (Traction & Rolling Stock) (MTRS), overseeing critical aspects of traction and rolling stock across Indian Railways. His ascent to the highest echelon of Indian Railways as the Chairman of the Railway Board (CRB) reflects his vast experience and leadership.

Kumar's leadership is anticipated to usher in significant advancements, not only in technological and operational efficiency but also in fostering a more equitable and

representative organizational culture within the Indian Railways. By breaking down entrenched barriers and cultivating an environment, where talent from all backgrounds can flourish, Kumar is setting a new standard for leadership in India.

Satish Kumar's recent appointment as Chairman and CEO of the Railway Board represents a historic milestone, not just for him personally, but for the entire nation. His ascension to this prestigious role breaks a significant barrier in Indian bureaucracy, marking a transformative shift towards a more inclusive society. This achievement highlights a growing recognition that talent and hard work are increasingly valued over traditional caste considerations. Kumar's success serves as a beacon of hope for millions of Dalits and marginalized communities, demonstrating that while caste-based challenges persist, they no longer constitute insurmountable obstacles to success. His journey underscores the possibility of a future where merit and perseverance, rather than caste, dictate one's destiny.

As India continues to navigate the complexities of its social landscape, Satish Kumar's rise to the helm of the Railway Board is a powerful affirmation of the nation's commitment to inclusivity and equality. It reflects a growing recognition that true progress is achieved when barriers are dismantled, and every individual is given the opportunity to contribute their best, irrespective of their origins.

Compiled by Team UV.

Dropouts in Indian Higher Education

(From page 22) understand if they have the required aptitude and attitude to succeed in these programs. If we consider yet another level of our story, we face more questions: Are our underprivileged students developed holistically in their adolescent days? Are we developing their physical literacy, which positively impacts cognitive abilities? Are we building their psychological attributes such as gratitude, resilience, achievement orientation, positivity, emotional intelligence, and knowledge orientation in the school systems? Are we sharpening their intellectual abilities by using various programs such as Scratch, book reading and critical thinking exercises? Shouldn't we impart life skills such as spoken English communication and collaboration, time management, presentation skills, etc. during school days instead of leaving

them to colleges and IITs?

Overall, I wouldn't think that the situation is a great cause of concern. However, I would appeal following some of the suggestions discussed above to improve the situation. We are aware that underprivileged students face somewhat similar problems in other branches of education, more pronounced for scheduled tribe students whose dropout rate stands at more than 12 percent while their population is around 8 percent. Some of the solutions discussed above may be helpful for those branches, too. All these solutions could help the underprivileged students, their families, the society, and our nation.

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Inspiring work of Kuldeep and Anand!

In 2022, I sat with a government official at the Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute (BARTI). During this meeting, I was introduced to a young, dynamic student activist named Kuldeep Ambekar. My friend, who had already crossed paths with him, was eager to share Kuldeep's story. Kuldeep hailed from a small village in Marathwada, the son of farm laborers. Despite the challenges of his background, he earned degrees in both science and law. More importantly, he became a vocal advocate for students' rights and concerns in SC, ST, and OBC communities.

Kuldeep's journey as an Ambedkarite youth led him to Pune, where, after completing his studies, he founded a non-governmental organization called "Students Helping Hands." His NGO took on an innovative approach to assist students in need by offering what he called a "Food Scholarship." This concept was entirely new to me. The idea of a "Food Scholarship" immediately piqued my interest, and I found it to be not only unique but also incredibly necessary.

Kuldeep's Food Scholarship aimed to provide



students, especially those who had migrated to cities for education, with monthly food assistance. So far, around 600 students had applied for this initiative, and Kuldeep worked tirelessly to ensure they received help through funds raised from CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) contributions. His efforts to support students with basic needs like food reminded me of a story about Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who faced similar struggles during his education abroad.

When Ambedkar was studying overseas, financial hardships made it difficult for him to afford regular meals. Despite these challenges, his determination to succeed never faltered. At one point, he even started eating in the library to save both time and money. A librarian noticed his situation and, instead of reprimanding him, began providing him with food. Kuldeep's work in providing food scholarships mirrors this act of kindness and support that was extended to Ambedkar.

But Kuldeep's efforts go beyond food. He has also been instrumental in providing scholarships

to students from drought-affected regions, where harsh conditions often lead to high dropout rates. One of the major reasons students leave higher education, especially in regions like Marathwada, is the financial burden. Even though education in government institutions may be relatively affordable, the cost of living in cities adds up quickly. I remember my own college days in 2003 when the monthly cost of meals in a mess was around ₹1,000 to ₹1,200. Today, that amount has soared to at least ₹4,000 per month.


Students Helping Hands is crucial in ensuring that students can continue their education without the looming fear of hunger or financial instability. His organization is providing a lifeline for those who need it the most.

Kuldeep's activism doesn't stop at scholarships. He has consistently spoken out about issues affecting SC, ST, and OBC students. He has even filed litigation to seek clarification from the government regarding irregularities in scholarship distribution. His approach is systematic, using legal channels to demand fee waivers for students from drought-hit areas. Kuldeep's commitment to education and equity makes him a powerful voice for social justice.

During our meeting, Kuldeep also introduced me to another inspiring individual, Anand Jadhav, a political science graduate from Fergusson College in Pune. Anand, an entrepreneur and an advocate for social justice, has earned a strong reputation within his community. He resides in Tadiwala Road, a densely populated slum in Pune, and has become a well-known figure there due to his work during the monsoon season and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In July, when heavy rains caused the river to overflow and flood Tadiwala Road, Anand quickly sprang into action. He was on the ground, helping to evacuate people to safer areas and ensuring they had access to food and shelter. During the pandemic, when the area was hit particularly hard, Anand, affectionately known as "Andy Baba" by those close to him, provided interest-free loans to over 100 small-scale entrepreneurs. He did this with the help of the "Maitri" Sanstha, a local organization. Anand has also contributed to flood relief efforts in Kerala.

Anand's work is channeled through his NGO, the Yuva Mitra Foundation. Having grown up in the very community he serves, Anand is deeply connected to the people of Tadiwala Road. His sense of responsibility is evident in everything he does. When asked about his vision, Anand often speaks of "Ambedkar 2.0." He explains that while



Dr. Ambedkar laid the foundation for social and political movements, the next step should focus on the economic upliftment of marginalized communities. For Anand, this is what Ambedkar 2.0 represents — a new phase of progress that builds on Ambedkar’s original mission.

Anand’s influence extends beyond just providing aid. He actively works to prevent youth from falling into the trap of addiction, advocates for their education, and promotes their financial independence. Tadiwala Road, still plagued by high rates of addiction and illiteracy, remains at the heart of his efforts. One of Anand’s most notable contributions is the annual celebration of Ambedkar Jayanti, which he marks by organizing a theatrical play about Ambedkar’s life called *Bhima Tuzya Janmamule* (Because

of Your Birth, Bhimrao). The play, which features hundreds of performers, has drawn crowds of thousands of people in the Tadiwala Road area. Through this drama, Anand emphasizes the importance of adopting Ambedkar’s thoughts by putting them into action.

As I reflect on the Ambedkarite movement, I firmly believe that both Kuldeep Ambekar and Anand Jadhav are carrying forward Ambedkar’s legacy in their unique ways. Their dedication to the cause of social justice and upliftment is not only inspiring but also a reminder that change happens when individuals are willing to stand up for what they believe in and help others along the way.

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Dalit Christians intensify efforts for Scheduled Caste Status recognition

Dalit Christians across India are stepping up their campaign for inclusion in the Scheduled Caste (SC) category, arguing that despite their conversion to Christianity, they continue to endure caste-based discrimination similar to Hindu Dalits. The demand is centred around access to benefits such as educational and job reservations that are currently available only to SC members within Hinduism.

Activists emphasize that the exclusion of Dalit Christians from SC status perpetuates inequality and neglects the socio-economic hardships faced by this community. The movement is gaining momentum as calls for justice and equal treatment grow louder.

SC asks Manipur HC to Reinstate Dalit Candidate as District Judge

The Supreme Court of India has directed the Manipur High Court to appoint a Dalit candidate as a District Judge after he was disqualified due to a change in eligibility rules. The candidate had initially qualified for the position, but a

subsequent alteration in the selection criteria led to his disqualification. The Supreme Court intervened, emphasizing the importance of fair treatment and ordered the High Court to reinstate him, ensuring justice for the affected candidate.

Karnataka uncertain on extending SC status to Dalit converts

The Karnataka government has not yet taken a firm stance on whether to extend Scheduled Caste (SC) status to Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam. Despite growing pressure from social groups advocating for equal treatment, the government is cautious due to the potential legal and social ramifications. The decision could have significant implications for the reservation system and the socio-political landscape in Karnataka, but the government remains non-committal, citing the need for further deliberation on the issue.

Fear keeps away 40 Dalit children from school

In a troubling case from a village, around 40 Dalit children have stopped attending school due to fear stemming from a conflict between two villages. Local officials intervened, mediating a compromise between the communities to address the situation. They also engaged with the children to encourage them to return to school, emphasizing the importance of education and safety. The resolution aims to restore normalcy and ensure the children can continue their education without fear.

*Compiled by Prajvalant.
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DIN VISHESH



Sant Tukdoji Maharaj (1909–1968) was a revered saint, philosopher, social reformer, and freedom fighter from Maharashtra, India. Born as Manik Devrao Kulkarni in the village of Yavali, Amravati district, he became known as Sant Tukdoji Maharaj for his spiritual teachings and deep commitment to social causes. His work and philosophy had a profound impact on the spiritual, cultural, and social landscape of Maharashtra and India.

Sant Tukdoji Maharaj played an active role in India's freedom movement against British colonial rule. He was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence, Satyagraha, and self-reliance.

Remembering Sant Tukdoji Maharaj

11th October

Sant Tukdoji Maharaj Death Anniversary

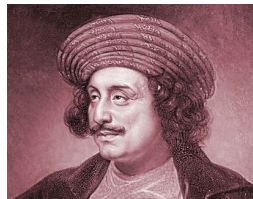
He participated in Quit India Movement in 1942 and was even imprisoned for his activism. Tukdoji Maharaj's speeches, songs, and kirtans (devotional music) were aimed at awakening the masses and inspiring them to fight for freedom. His efforts to promote self-sufficiency and social justice made him a key figure in motivating the rural and common people during the independence struggle.

Sant Tukdoji Maharaj was deeply committed to the upliftment of the rural poor. He believed that spirituality should go hand-in-hand with social service and worked tirelessly for the betterment of the underprivileged. He encouraged education, healthcare, sanitation, and self-reliance in rural communities.

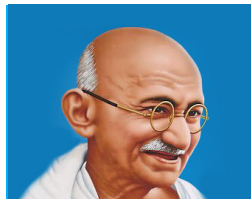
One of his significant contributions was the formation of the All-India Shri Gurudev Seva Mandal, an organization dedicated to social welfare and community service. Under his leadership, the Seva Mandal focused on promoting village development, emphasizing cleanliness, education, and communal harmony.



26th September
Shankardev
Birth Anniversary



27th September
Raja Ram Mohan Roy
Death Anniversary



2nd October
Mahatma Gandhi
Birth Anniversary



12th October
Ram Manohar Lohia
Death Anniversary

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