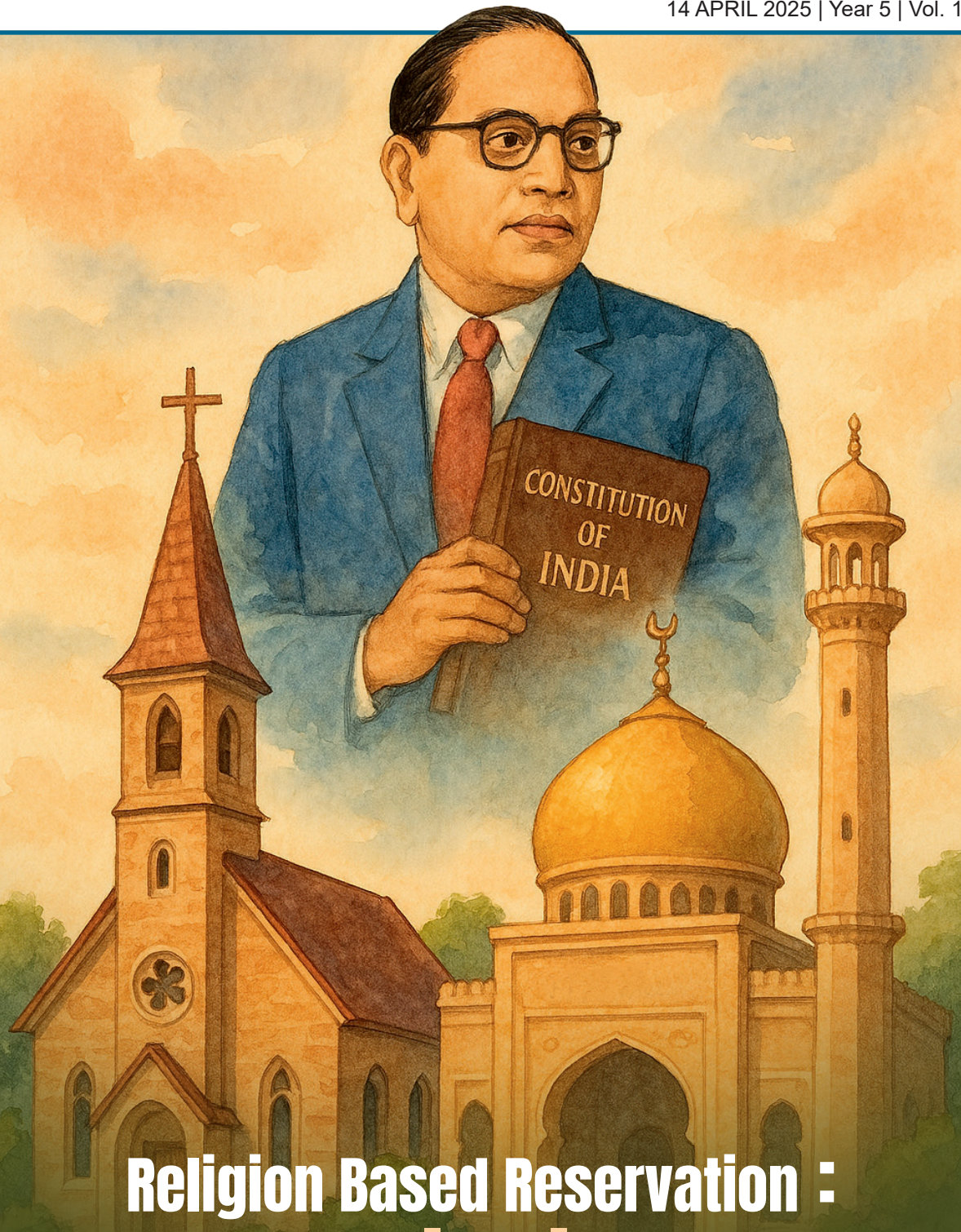


# UNHEARD VOICES<sup>®</sup>

14 APRIL 2025 | Year 5 | Vol. 1



## Religion Based Reservation : An Unconstitutional Move





# Sign of Sickness

**K**erala Chief Secretary Sarada Muraleedharan's emotional outburst on the colour discrimination, which she has experienced, is not merely alarming but underlines the immediate need to educate and awaken the people in establishing equality. While India is witnessing a few signs of materialistic prosperity, its intellectual and emotional poverty can be seen through Sarada Muraleedharan's bitter experience. Sarada Muraleedharan is the current chief secretary of Kerala. We can imagine the ground realities if a person, holding the top most post in bureaucracy, is experiencing discrimination. The issue is not restricted to a particular state but concerns the entire country and even entire humanity as it involves discrimination on the basis of colour. In a Facebook post, Sarada Muraleedharan had shared her experience. She says, "When you are a black (dark-skinned) woman, you are invisible". Her post makes all sensible, responsible and matured people to ponder upon what we have achieved after prolonged efforts to establish equality in India. Her remark - 'You are invisible' is painful and tragic as it almost amounts to denying very existence of a human being, who is black or dark skinned.

Sarada Muraleedharan's experience has exposed serious flaws and inconsistencies in Indian society. We must candidly admit that Sarada Muraleedharan's experience is not merely confined to colour discrimination. All the possible grounds of discrimination, mainly gender, colour and caste, are involved in the issue. In fact, Sarada Muraleedharan has not hesitated to link caste element with the colour bias. She had

bluntly said that lower caste people are considered black skinned, further adding to their woes. India's obsession with white skin or resentment with black skin is no more secret. Consequently, people from deprived communities suffer discrimination on several grounds like caste, language, life style and gender. Sarada Muraleedharan, had shared that her performance and merits were also challenged due to her skin colour. This also, is not a new experience as several beneficiaries of reservation undergo such disgusting situations. The caste sensitivities at work place and its impact are even reported beyond boundaries with some countries opting to include caste as a ground for discrimination. We need to think whether we go with the same biases and prejudices when we cross Indian boundaries and call ourselves as progressive with pride.

Sarada Muraleedharan has even gone to the extent of saying that people of Kerala did not consider her Malayali. To add to her agony, she is considered as a woman from high caste Hindu but her colour prevents people from recognizing her from the same category. This experience is more serious as its skin colour overpowers deeply rooted caste sensitivities. Her experience is a combination of all the grounds for discrimination. Sarada Muraleedharan episode is strong evidence of the tragedy of social reformation movement. This is more serious in view of the fact that it happened in a state like Kerala, which has a long legacy of social reformation movement and is dominated by Communist ideology. Kerala also has the highest rate of literacy for decades. However, neither so-

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'Unheard Voices' monthly publication is owned by Social Studies Foundation, Printed and Published by Hari Sowani, Printed at Sanwad Trade Prints, Gowaikar Bldg, 595, Shaniwar Peth, Pune- 411030 and Published at 1196, Sadashiv Peth, Pune- 411030.

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**Advisory Editorial Board** : Dr Aditi Narayani Paswan, Edward Mendhe, Prakash Raj

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called progressive thoughts nor education seems to have brought transformation among the people. We have several states, where caste sensitivities are more intense, resulting in undesirable incidents. People from deprived communities are legally empowered to initiate corrective/penal action against such incidents but enforcement of such laws is always questioned thanks to the strong biases of the administration. What would happen to an ordinary man if a woman, who controls the entire administration of a state, finds herself in a helpless situation because of discrimination. This also exposes the limitations of laws as nothing punitive has happened so far.

India faces a grave problem of untouchability. This problem is coupled with skin colour, which was used by British regime by floating various theories. It was the same British regime, which observed, protected and encouraged apartheid in South Africa till recently. Colour bias is so strong that Sarada Muraleedharan has said that she had been facing hardships because of her colour since childhood. This is nothing but mental sickness of the society, which has to be condemned in no uncertain terms. We have to remind ourselves all the

time that nothing is worse if discrimination is justified. We have to have self-talk, which tells us all the time that discrimination has no space in Indian society.

Sarada Muraleedharan incident is a matter of severe shame for the entire country. Unfortunately, people have not responded to it sensibly and in a matured way. Is it irrational to expect people to take note of this incident seriously? One is tempted to draw a parallel between the idea of a 'creamy layer'. People from creamy layer are supposed to be beneficiaries of reservation. But do they really get equal treatment in a true spirit? Reality is that people, irrespective of his/her education, position and economic status continue to get discriminatory treatment.

This is also a matter of grave concern as ancient Indian history never showed colour-based discrimination. We must remember that Prabhu Ramchandra and Bhagwan Shrikrishna, who are the most revered Gods in India, were considered dark skinned. They would not have revered for ages, had Indians been carrying colour bias. Need of the hour is to awaken, educate and take corrective steps to destroy these "imported sicknesses".

## 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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# Dalit diaspora movements beyond Indian borders

The organized efforts by educated Dalits represents continued progress towards the goals of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, dignity, and the annihilation of caste. Consequently, this ongoing struggle and pursuit of a dignified identity and an egalitarian society will continue in the long term.


Dr Shailendra Kumar

The Dalits are inspired by the socio-political movements against caste discrimination that originated in the 19th century and strengthened by Dr Ambedkar's philosophy and the new constitution of India. They are highly motivated by Dr Ambedkar's ideas, philosophy and activism. The Dalit diaspora has emerged as a community with a distinct identity of its own within the rubric of the larger Indian diaspora. In recent times, the advancements in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have increased interaction between Dalits both at home and abroad.

The Dalit diaspora is aware of the historical discrimination and its persistence today and they have a strong consciousness and responsibility

towards its alleviation. Historically, at the national and international levels there were differences in the sociopolitical assertions, aspirations and activism of Dalits. However, they were always united by ideologies, inspirations and the pursuit for a dignified identity.

Therefore, in recent times numerous strategies of cooperation, transnational solidarity, internationalisation of caste discrimination, financial support, etc. have intensified among transnational organisations and institutions working on Dalit issues. Dalits both in India and abroad have highlighted the issues of caste discrimination at several international forums. In 2001, during the United Nations (UN) Conference on Racial



Discrimination at Durban, caste discrimination was equated to racial discrimination or apartheid. Dalit diaspora persuasively asserted the presence of 'caste in Britain' and campaigned vigorously for inclusion of caste as protected characteristics in the Equality Act, 2010, UK. In the USA, the Cisco case of caste discrimination in 2020 and California Anti Caste Bill, 2023 is a significant step to include caste as protected category within the US law. Therefore, this article examines the significant efforts by Dalit diaspora to combat caste discrimination internationally thereby expanding the scope of their activism and contributing to the field of Dalit studies.

### **Caste among Indian Diaspora**

The political and economic changes ushered by globalisation in the late 20th century significantly expanded the Indian diaspora in industrial nations, including the USA, Canada, Britain, and Australia. The Dalit diaspora has evolved as a distinct social category and identity defined by its sociopolitical assertions and aspirations. Even among the Indian diaspora caste remains deeply entrenched and is carried across borders as part of their ancestral identity. In these circumstances, Ambedkar quotes Ketkar and says, '...if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem' (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 6). Thus, it is hardly surprising that the Indian diaspora continues to preserve the same social structures and cultural practices across generations and borders.

The caste system is still 'alive and kicking' and endures through social interaction, exclusion, segregation and endogamy among the Indian diaspora predominantly residing in the developed and egalitarian Western countries. Endogamy is a crucial feature of caste system and is evident in the advertisements for matrimony in Asian periodicals and websites seeking same caste spouses. In contrast, inter-caste marriages are socially stigmatized, often resulting in personal conflicts, harassment, and even acts of violence. Distinct places of worship are established along caste lines, like Valmiki temples, Guru Ravidas gurdwaras, Buddhist Sabhas and others. Popular music and cultural productions are used for caste glorification (Judge, 2002). The lower castes are often called by pejorative names like choora and chamar (DSN UK, 2006). Caste extends beyond the private sphere, influencing educational institutions, workplaces, and public services. Thereby, it dictates social interactions and relationships among different castes.

Initially, Dalits coalesced their identities

with the broader Indian diaspora as a means of protection against racial and other forms of discrimination in their host countries. It was only after the 1980s that a cohesive and united Dalit identity began to take shape, driven by educated and professional leaders who organized and mobilized the community to challenge caste hegemony and systemic discrimination.

Moreover, in the 1990s, the Dalit movement acquired an international character, leading to the rise of various transnational organizations both in India and across the diaspora. Thus, the Dalit diaspora emerged as a distinct social category bound by the shared stigma of birth and the disabilities associated with it. The 'Millennial Dalit Diaspora' representing Ambedkarites, Ravidassī's and Valmiki's and Dalit Christians inspires the diasporic movement of the marginalised communities. Furthermore, Dalits originating from diverse regions of India and representing various sub-caste affiliations established their own organizations to promote solidarity and pursue their ongoing struggle against caste discrimination. The list of some of the important Transnational Dalit Organisations are as follows:

**Canada:** Dr Ambedkar Memorial Association (1979), Guru Ravidas Sabha (1981) and Sri Guru Ravidas Community (1986). Maharishi Valmiki Sabha, Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), Indian Buddhist Society and International Bahujan Organisation.

**UK:** Ravidas Sabhas; Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organisation (FABO, 1985); Ambedkar Centre for Justice and Peace (ACJP, 1991); Dalit Solidarity Network UK (DSN UK, 1998); International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN, 2000); Voice of Dalit International (VODI, 1999); CasteWatchUK (2004); Anti-Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA, 2008) and others.

**USA:** Volunteers in Service of India's Poor and Neglected (VISION, 1970s); Ambedkar Literary Vision (1991); AIM (2003); Ambedkar Association of North America, Boston Study Group, Dalit Solidarity; Ambedkar Association of North America; Ambedkar International Mission, Ambedkar International Center; Ambedkar King Study Circle; International Campaign for Dalit Human Rights; Friends for India's Education; Dalit American Coalition; Dalit American Women's Association; and Equality Labs.

### **Dalit Diaspora Activism**

These organisations not only celebrated sociocultural practices, icons, ideas and struggle against caste discrimination, they also



engaged in fostering awareness about it at the international level. Since the 1990s, Dalits both in India and diaspora through civil society organizations have been actively engaged in raising the problem of caste discrimination at different international forums (Kumar, 2022). Four major instances of Dalit diaspora activism across different countries are discussed here as case study.

First, in 1996, UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recognised that caste discrimination is a type of descent-based racial discrimination defined in Article 1 of International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (Vaughray, 2013). Consequently, the caste discrimination was accepted as a type of 'discrimination based on work and descent (DWD)' and violation of international human rights law. Furthermore, many UN human rights agencies have dealt with caste discrimination within the purview of DWD framework of 'racial discrimination'. Moreover, several reports by the UN Human Rights Review and civil society organisations consider caste discrimination and practices of untouchability as akin to hidden apartheid. There were efforts to push for recognition of caste discrimination as similar to the racial discrimination or apartheid in the World Conference against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) at Durban, South Africa in 2001, and subsequently during the Durban Review Conference at Geneva in 2009. Although these attempts were foiled by the government of India, Dalits succeeded in the inclusion of a 'work and descent' provision which advocated 'constitutional, legislative and administrative measures' along with affirmative action by all the concerned governments.

Second, the Dalit diaspora in the UK effectively confirmed the existence of 'caste

in Britain' through numerous studies by academia and government agencies during the debates on inclusion of caste as a 'protected' category in the Equality Act, 2010, UK. The debates continued for long, and after the public deliberations with both for and against groups on Caste and Equality Law in 2017, the government apparently under pressure from upper caste groups decided not to include caste within the legislation by citing caste as 'difficult to define' and 'extremely low' number of cases of caste discrimination. Consequently, it was determined that the matter would be governed by the evolving body of case law, deemed an 'appropriate and proportionate' measure. Presently, the development of case law is the only way forward.

Third, on June 30, 2020, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) sued Cisco for caste discrimination against Indian American employee John Doe (name changed), allegedly perpetrated by his upper-caste Hindu supervisors, Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella. In October 2016, his caste was revealed by his manager to the team, which led to the subsequent discrimination in the form of retaliation, isolation, loss of responsibilities, and denial of promotion. Despite several complaints, there was no redressal due lack of understanding about caste discrimination. In the absence of specific or explicit law against caste discrimination in the American legal system, Cisco was accused of violating the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on religion, ancestry, national origin/ethnicity, and race/colour. It was also accused of violating California's Fair Employment and Housing Act, and its actions were described as willful, malicious, fraudulent and oppressive (Mukherji, 2020; Rajan, 2020). Since the filing of the case, there has seen several significant rulings and orders. The Cisco case remains active, with Dalit



diaspora organizations persistently asserting the existence of caste discrimination in the USA. They have also collected evidence for the support of their arguments. As a result of this case, anti-caste policies have been adopted in educational institutions, and anti-caste legislation has been proposed at city and state levels. The case prompted companies, including Cisco and Apple, to add caste to their anti-discrimination policy guidelines. The most significant outcome is that it forced Americans to acknowledge the reality of caste within the Indian diaspora, leading to its inclusion in public discourse.

Last, one of the most important developments of this case is the anti-caste discrimination Bill in California. On August 28, 2023, State Senator Aisha Wahab introduced Senate Bill 403 (SB 403) an anti-caste discrimination bill that revises California's Unruh Civil Rights Act, Education, and Housing codes by adding "caste" as a protected category under "ancestry" which was passed by the California State Assembly. The Bill garnered support from a range of civil rights activists and organizations working towards caste equity within the United States. The legislation aims to combat caste discrimination and protect marginalized communities throughout the state. The proposed legislation aimed to make California the first U.S. state to enshrine caste as a protected class within its anti-discrimination laws. However, Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed the bill calling it "unnecessary", explaining that California "already prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, colour, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other characteristics, and state law specifies that these civil rights protections shall be liberally construed". He added that "Because discrimination based on caste is already prohibited under these existing categories, this bill is unnecessary" (Clayton, 2023). However, this viewpoint overlooks the distinct characteristics of caste-based discrimination and its significance for immigrants from South Asian and similarly structured societies where birth determines social exclusion.

### **Conclusion**

The Dalit diaspora has significantly contributed to the international recognition of caste and descent-based discrimination as a matter of racism and human rights, raising awareness across various global forums. The objective of their strategy is to bring together all communities worldwide that experience descent-based discrimination in any form. The second major achievement is their effort to

establish the presence of 'Caste in Britain', and their efforts to include caste as a protected category in the Equality Act, 2010. Third, the Cisco case of caste discrimination within the model minority brings the issue out of the closet in the USA and opens it for social scrutiny. Numerous studies conducted by academic institutions and civil society organizations also highlight this pervasive issue. The Dalit diaspora agitated by the continued presence of caste discrimination in the U.S., despite its liberal and egalitarian ideals, called for the inclusion of caste as a protected legal category in American legislation. To substantiate their claims of persistent caste discrimination, they presented academic studies, survey data, and personal testimonies, and demanded its mitigation through social and legal interventions. The California Anti-caste discrimination Bill, 2023 was the culmination of these demands. Despite the Governor's rejection, the Bill testifies to the recognition of caste discrimination within the US Indian diaspora and will remain significant in future case laws, now that caste has been established as a form of discrimination.

These cases are interconnected within a larger network of human rights activism, promoting the exchange of ideas and fostering solidarity among marginalised communities. The significant achievement of these debates has been to elevate the caste issue to a central concern in Western discourse and at international forums, resulting in its condemnation and demands for remedial action. These struggles are an effort to build global unity and solidarity, mobilizing action against caste discrimination and striving to create positive change and an egalitarian society by addressing both victims and perpetrators. Moreover, the efforts outlined above are instrumental in raising awareness, building unity of purpose, and creating a comprehensive framework for resolutions among the global community. These initiatives can also be seen as an effort to seek global remedies to address local problems that are perpetrated at the micro or community level but have proliferated into a multifaceted global challenge. This organized movement by educated Dalits represents continued progress towards the goals of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, dignity, and the annihilation of caste. Consequently, this ongoing struggle and pursuit of a dignified identity and an egalitarian society will continue in the long term.

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Karnataka government's decision to introduce four per cent reservation to Muslims in government contracts has sparked a big debate and controversy in the country. It is seen as yet another move of appeasement policy, which, many fear, would have serious consequences. Karnataka reservation has once again generated debate on reservation based on religion.

## Karnataka reservation for Muslims: A regressive move

Prasanna




The appeasement of Muslim by the Indian National Congress to get power is well known to the people. Even before independence, the Indian National Congress (INC) envisioned a united India, where all communities lived together under one nation. However, the Muslim League (ML), despite early cooperation like the 1916 Lucknow Pact, gradually exposed its communal agenda by demanding separate electorates—planting the seeds of division. The League consistently refused to accept the idea of equal citizenship, prioritizing religious identity over national unity, especially after rejecting the inclusive Nehru Report.

After the 1937 elections, it turned its back on Congress outreach and falsely claimed to

represent all Muslims. In 1940, Jinnah and the ML betrayed the freedom struggle by demanding Pakistan under the divisive two-nation theory. While Congress leaders and countless patriots were jailed for launching the Quit India Movement, the League shamelessly sided with the British. The violent 1946 Direct Action Day, called by the ML, led to brutal attacks on Hindus, especially in Bengal. The Muslim League's communal politics and alliance with colonial powers led to the painful partition, scarring millions of Hindu families and uprooting ancient civilizational bonds.

In crude and lucid language, Dr B R Ambedkar expounded that Islam was a divisive religion, a faith that segregated people into rigid groups of



Muslims and non-Muslims, where the benefits of brotherhood and fraternity were limited only to the former, i.e. Muslims, while the latter was treated with contempt and enmity. In spite of this the Congress continue to support Muslim in each and every act just to get power. The recent debates surrounding reservations for Muslim communities in government contracts have reignited a longstanding tension in Indian policy—how to reconcile affirmative action with the secular principles enshrined in the Constitution.

Karnataka has proposed a four per cent reservation for Muslim contractors under Category 2B of the OBC list in government tenders. This move amends the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurements (KTPP) Act, 1999. It will apply to civil works contracts up to Rs two crore and goods/services contracts up to Rs one crore. The proposal was announced by CM Siddaramaiah in the 2025–26 budgets on March 7. Currently, SCs and STs have 24% reservation, OBC–Category 1 has four per cent, and OBC–Category 2A has 15 per cent. The Karnataka government’s four per cent reservation for Muslim contractors is seen by many as blatant appeasement politics. Instead of addressing backwardness across all communities, the policy unfairly prioritizes religion. Hindu SC, ST, and OBC communities feel betrayed after decades of struggle for representation. The move undermines the secular spirit of the Constitution by favouring one religious group. Its timing before elections signals a clear attempt to secure a specific vote bank. Such actions marginalize the majority and create communal imbalance in public policy. Hindus, especially Dalits, argue that governance should be based on socioeconomic criteria, not religion. This trend sets a dangerous precedent that threatens national unity and fairness. In 2004, Andhra Pradesh granted a five per cent reservation to Muslims under Articles 15(4) and 16(4), raising total quotas to 51 per cent, breaching the 50 per cent ceiling set by the Supreme Court in *Indra Sawhney VS Union of India* case in 1992. The AP High Court struck it down for bypassing the Backward Classes Commission and failing to exclude the creamy layer, violating Article 14.

In 2005, the state reintroduced the quota via Ordinance and later legislation, based on the Commission’s claim of socio-economic and educational backwardness of Muslims. However, in *M. Nagaraj v. Union of India* (2006), the High Court again struck it down, citing lack of objective criteria and the unconstitutional treatment of Muslims as a homogenous group.

The reservation violated Articles 15(1) and 16(2), which prohibit religion-based quotas. The case was appealed in the Supreme Court, which in 2010 ordered status quo but deferred hearing until after the EWS quota was settled.

Despite the EWS verdict in November 2022, the Muslim quota issue remains pending before the Supreme Court. In a significant move upholding constitutional value, the Calcutta High Court struck down OBC status for 37 Muslim groups in West Bengal, exposing how religion alone was misused to extend reservation benefits. The Court found that the selection of 77 Muslim communities was based purely on religious identity, not backwardness, which insulted the idea of true social justice. Around five lakh certificates issued since 2010 were affected, but jobs already secured remained untouched. The Court nullified key sections of the 2012 Act that had unfairly allocated ten per cent and seven per cent quotas to OBC-A and OBC-B—largely Muslim groups. The Supreme Court, while hearing Bengal’s appeal, rightly emphasized that reservation cannot be religion-based. This judgment safeguards Hindu backward castes who were being sidelined under vote-bank politics. It also sends a strong message that appeasement policies threatening India’s secular and merit-based framework will not be tolerated. In Kerala, the inclusion of Muslims and other religious groups like Latin Catholics and Christian converts within the OBC quota has long raised concerns among Hindu communities.

Muslims alone enjoy a 12 per cent sub-quota within the 40% OBC reservation, while Ezhavas, Nadar, and other Hindu groups are distributed smaller shares despite large populations and historical backwardness. Religion-based reservation, which began in 1936 under princely rule, has now been normalized, often at the cost of genuine caste-based upliftment. The Supreme Court has repeatedly stated that reservations should not be based solely on religion, yet states like Kerala continue this divisive trend. Hindu communities question why caste-based backwardness is being sidelined to appease religious groups. The principle of social justice is being eroded in the name of vote-bank politics, pushing deserving Hindu OBCs further behind. In Tamil Nadu, while the state officially reserves 30 per cent for OBCs, a 3.5 per cent sub-quota was carved out specifically for a section of Muslims in 2007—excluding upper-caste Muslims. This move sparked concerns among Hindu communities, as it marked a shift toward religion-linked reservation within a framework traditionally based on caste and socio-economic



backwardness. Initially, the Act also extended benefits to certain Christian castes, but even the Christian community later opposed this and had it withdrawn. Hindu voices argue that such religious segmentation undermines the core idea of affirmative action, which should focus on caste-based historical injustices rather than religion driven appeasement. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement in Jharkhand resonates strongly with every Hindu who believes in the Constitution and true social justice. He made it clear: if the BJP stands, no religion-based reservation will ever be allowed. Congress, driven by vote-bank politics, is trying to snatch away the rights of OBCs, Dalits, and Tribals to appease a specific community. In Maharashtra, they openly supported a

**The Karnataka government's four per cent reservation for Muslim contractors is seen by many as blatant appeasement politics. Instead of addressing backwardness across all communities, the policy unfairly prioritizes religion. Hindu SC, ST, and OBC communities feel betrayed after decades of struggle for representation. The move undermines the secular spirit of the Constitution by favouring one religious group.**

demand for 10 per cent Muslim quota, directly threatening the hard-earned reservations of marginalized Hindu communities. "If such a Muslim quota is created, the biggest losers will be OBCs, Dalits, and Tribals," Shah warned. This is not just about reservation—it's about the soul of the country. Hindus have waited generations for justice, and it is unacceptable that their rights be compromised for political appeasement. Under BJP, the Constitution will be respected, and religion will never be used as a tool to divide the nation. At the core of the Karnataka Muslim quota controversy lies a blatant violation of the Constitution's secular spirit. Question arises how religion—specifically Islam—can become the basis for special treatment in government policy. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who stood firmly for equality and justice, never envisioned a system where one religion is given preferential treatment over others. Articles 15(4) and 16(4) allow reservations for the socially and educationally backward—not for religious groups. The

1950 Presidential Order also made it clear: reservation is not for religious identity, but for caste-based historical injustice. Karnataka's decision to extend benefits to Muslims based on religion is not just unconstitutional—it is dangerous. It threatens to erode decades of carefully balanced affirmative action meant for OBCs, SCs, and STs. This move reeks of vote-bank politics and will not stand the test of law or public scrutiny.

People are incensed by the imposition of religion-based reservations, viewing them as a direct attack on the constitutional promise of equal opportunity. They argue that these quotas are nothing more than a sham, deliberately engineered to pander to minority vote banks at the expense of historically oppressed Hindu communities. The radical shift from traditional caste and economic criteria to blatant religious favoritism is seen as a betrayal of the core principles championed by our founding leaders. For these supporters, the manipulation of affirmative action not only undermines merit and justice but also dilutes the hard-won rights of genuine victims of centuries of discrimination.

They contend that such divisive policies are an affront to Bharat's secular ethos and set a dangerous precedent that could ultimately erode the unity of our great nation. In their view, the true spirit of reservation should rectify centuries of neglect against backward communities—not reward political appeasement. For many Hindus, this is a call to arms to reclaim our constitutional heritage and push back against any policy that privileges religion over true socio-economic justice. In conclusion, religion-based reservation is a flagrant betrayal of the constitutional values that have united Bharat for centuries. It is a deliberate ploy to divide the nation by favouring narrow religious interests over genuine socio-economic justice.

For too long, deprived communities have borne the brunt of historical discrimination, and it is unacceptable to dilute their hard-won rights with policies that reward vote-bank politics rather than merit. People must reject any attempt to skew affirmative action in favour of religion and instead preserve the true spirit of reservation—one that uplifts those who have suffered based on caste and economic backwardness, not religious identity. As proud custodians of our heritage, we will stand firm against divisive, radical measures that threaten the unity and integrity of the nation. There will be no place for religion-based reservation in Bharat, not now, not ever.

*Pls see page no. 12*

# 'No reservation beyond Hindu fold'

Vijendra

Karnataka government's diabolical decision to introduce four per cent reservation to Muslims in government contracts has generated a big debate in the country. The debate is mainly focused on constitutional validity of the move and political design behind the decision. However, one must take into account some more serious factors, which go beyond constitution and politics, involved in the issue. Unfortunately, political parties are involved in mud-slugging against each other, neglecting national interest, unity and geographical integrity of the country.

The fundamental issue involved in Muslim reservation is whether reservation can be based on the religion. The simple answer is "NO". On April 4, 1949, Dr Ambedkar said in the Constituent Assembly, "Scheduled Castes were a backward section of the Hindu community, who were handicapped by the practice of untouchability and that this evil practice of untouchability was not recognised by any other religion and question of any Scheduled Caste belonging to a religion other than Hinduism did not therefore arise".

Dr Ambedkar's statement has three very crucial elements 1) Scheduled Castes were a backward community of Hindu community, which was handicapped by practice of untouchability. 2) Untouchability was not recognised by any religion, other than Hinduism. 3) Dr Ambedkar very categorically rejected inclusion of Scheduled Castes, belonging to a religion other than Hinduism. Dr Ambedkar's opinion is strong evidence of the fact that he was never in favour of reservation to non-Hindus. People, who are in favour of extending reservation to Muslims to Christians may take help of some other constitutional provisions but the reality has to be accepted any such attempt would be against the constitutional spirit.

Debate in constituent Assembly unequivocally shows that reservation was meant for socially handicapped people from Hindu community. Muslim leaders were insisting on political reservation in the independent India, which was not accepted by the Constituent Assembly. Muslim leaders never asked for reservation for the upliftment of their religious fellows. What does this indicate?

These socially handicapped people are from those groups, which were sufferers of untouchability. Both the Abrahamic religions – Christianity and Islam – do not

have untouchability like Hindus. Therefore, reservation can be granted to only members of Hindus, who suffered from untouchability. Granting reservation to the people other than Hindus would be against constitutional spirit. Interestingly most of conversions – both Christianity and Islam took place as preachers of both the religions assured converts that they would have freedom from the caste system.

Many fear genuinely that reservation for Muslims in government contracts will open the flood gate. The Karnataka decision is restricted to government contracts but it can be extended to education and employment in the near future. Several political parties, including Congress, are consistently insisting on this demand. Reservation for Muslims in government contracts is seen as a test case to judge the reactions coming from the people. Deprived communities from Hindu fold must oppose this move as reservation is bound to extend to employment and education in the near future. This reservation will not be restricted to Muslims alone but Christians would also be granted the reservation. Deprived communities in Hindu fold would be directly affected if reservation is granted to two Abrahamic religions. It would be straight encroachment on their constitutional right.

Timing of Karnataka's decision on Muslim reservation has come under scanner. Hindus have been carrying a grudge against appeasement politics. This is validated by three consecutive victories of BJP, which is now not shy in pushing Hindutva agenda. The latest example is Waqf Bill. Any move to push Muslim reservation is bound to be retaliated by Hindus. Is it necessary at this moment of time?

Reservation to Muslims is sure to affect the demography of the country. In fact, strong evidence of major demographic change is seen in several states and pockets, which has affected the social fabric of this nation. Ground reality is that deprived communities and Muslims have always bitter relationships. Any attempt to encroach on the rights of SC/ST communities is bound to create tension. Why are we taking this risk at the cost of national interests? People have strong resentment on drafting special schemes exclusively for minorities. People are challenging the usage of the term 'minority'. Pushing for religion-based reservation would be suicidal against this backdrop.

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# Cracking caste wall in Bengal's Gidhgram through temple entry

Article examines the deeply symbolic and transformative temple entry of Dalit individuals in Gidhgram, West Bengal. Set against a historical backdrop of caste-based exclusion, this movement challenges entrenched social hierarchies and exposes the fault lines within Bengal's myth of caste blindness.

Through eyewitness accounts, administrative reports, and cultural analysis, the paper unpacks the emotional, spiritual, and political significance of the event and contrasts it with ongoing exclusions in villages like Debgram. It is a story of reclamation, resilience, and the redrawing of sacred boundaries.


Dr. Prodip



March 12, 2025. A quiet morning in Gidhgram, a village in Ketugram II Block, Purba Bardhaman district, West Bengal (PIN 713147). Fog clung to neem trees as roosters called across the fields. But inside the Gideshwar Shiva Temple, the morning bells rang differently. For the first time in over 300 years, members of the Muchi (Dalit) community stepped inside the sanctum—not to clean it, not to circle it—but to worship. This wasn't merely a gesture of religious devotion. It was an act of historical defiance, a reclaiming of space that had long been denied to them based on caste.

## Bengal's myth of caste lessness

West Bengal has long worn the garb of progressive politics—home to intellectual revolution, communism, and cultural modernity. Unlike the explicit caste conflicts seen in other Indian states, caste in Bengal



hides behind subtler veils: surnames, rituals, silence. While many urban Bengalis claim to be “beyond caste,” Dalit communities in rural Bengal face daily indignities—from segregated temple spaces to discrimination in cremation grounds. Caste in Bengal doesn’t scream—it whispers, but its effects are no less violent.

### **Temple as a Tool of Exclusion**

In Hindu society, temples are more than religious sites—they are symbols of inclusion, legitimacy, and honour. To be barred from a temple is to be told that one’s soul is inferior. In Gidhgram, the Gideshwar Shiva Temple stood at the heart of the village, both literally and socially. While the Muchi community could play the drums (dhak) during festivals, they were never allowed to cross the iron gate into the inner sanctum. Worship was permitted only from afar. Offerings were placed at the edge of the compound. Rituals were carried out without their names.

### **Long Wait – Stories of Generational Exclusion**

“My grandfather lit lamps outside that temple every Shivratri but never entered,” said Santana Das, 67. “He used to say, ‘God sees me even from here.’ But I always wondered—if He sees us, why doesn’t He call us in?” Many elders recall childhood traumas—being chased away, mocked, or even beaten for stepping too close. These exclusions were not written rules—they were practiced through body language, social codes, and ritual choreography that left Dalits always on the margins of sacred life.

### **Administrative Silence and Social Complicity**

Despite petitions from the Muchi community since the early 1990s, little action was taken. Officials cited “peacekeeping,” while temple trustees hid behind tradition. The Left Front government, in power for decades, avoided confrontation with religious bodies. And the subsequent governments did little to disrupt rural caste dynamics. In reality, caste operated through a network of passive complicity—where officials turned a blind eye and dominant caste members enforced segregation with quiet authority.

### **Spark of Change – Youth Mobilization**

The winds of change came from within. A group of local Dalit youth, led by 25-year-old Prashant Das, started a reading circle focused on Dr Ambedkar, Savitribai Phule, and the Indian Constitution. They began filing RTIs, approaching district officials, and documenting caste-based exclusion in

the village. Over months, they built public awareness using posters, street plays, and WhatsApp campaigns—turning what was once seen as “fate” into a constitutional violation.

### **A Historic Negotiation**

With the pressure mounting, a formal complaint was lodged with the District Magistrate’s office in Bardhaman. Meetings were held between temple trustees, local panchayat members, and Dalit representatives. It was decided that on Shivratri (March 12, 2025), a limited group from the Muchi community would be allowed inside the temple under official protection. The aim was to ensure symbolic access and set a precedent without provoking violence.

### **Day of Entry – March 12, 2025**

At 9:00 AM, five Muchi villagers—three women and two men—approached the temple gates. The air was thick with incense and tension. Police officers lined the narrow path. Bystanders stood silently—some with folded arms, others with cold stares. As the group entered, time seemed to stand still. For a moment, the collective weight of 300 years lifted. Tears flowed. Flowers were offered. Lamps were lit. The gods, once silent, now received prayers from those long unwelcome.

### **Emotional Aftermath**

For Santana Das, the entry was a rebirth. “For the first time, I didn’t feel invisible,” she said. Others echoed the sentiment. Some dominant caste villagers quietly praised the move; others boycotted temple rituals in protest. But no one could deny the energy shift. Something sacred had changed—not just for the temple but for the entire village.

### **Temple’s History – 300 Years of Caste Control**

The Gideshwar Shiva Temple was built in the late 1700s by local zamindars of upper-caste lineage. For centuries, it was guarded by caste codes—enforced not just through rules but through ritual memory. No Muchi had ever crossed its threshold—not because it was law, but because it was a social gospel. A single unwritten rule had lasted 300 years. Until it didn’t.

### **Contrasting Realities – Debgram’s Continued Exclusion**

While Gidhgram celebrates its breakthrough, just 150 km away in Debgram (Nadia district), a similar story remains unresolved. The Ruidas community continues to be barred from the local Kali temple. Priests refuse to officiate pujas if they enter. Even festival invitations are segregated. In



Debgram, fear silences protest. “We saw what happened in Gidhgram,” said one Ruidas youth. “But here, people say we’ll lose our jobs if we speak up.”

### Rituals of Resistance

In Debgram, a small group began lighting lamps outside the temple every Amavasya (new moon), chanting mantras and reading Dr Ambedkar’s speeches. It became a counter-ritual, a way of reclaiming sacred time even without sacred space. This quiet defiance mirrors the mood of many Dalit communities across Bengal—resistance not through riots



but through ritual.

### Emotional Cost of Exclusion

Religious exclusion is not just about denial—it’s about identity fracture. Children learn early that their gods live behind walls they cannot cross. This creates a spiritual inferiority complex, passed down through generations. For many, temple access is less about faith and more about dignity.

### Institutional Response and Civil Society Role

NGOs like Dalit Shakti Bengal and youth collectives worked alongside district officials to prepare for Gidhgram’s temple entry. Educational pamphlets, door-to-door campaigns, and caste-sensitization drives were launched. It showed that real change is possible when institutions partner with grassroots movements.

### Political Reactions

No major party made a statement. This political silence was criticized by Dalit leaders. “Everyone praises Ambedkar during elections,” said Prashant Das, “but when we enter temples, they disappear.” This reveals the fragile position of caste justice in Bengal’s political landscape.

### Spiritual Democracy and Legal Rights

The Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and equality before the law. Temple entry is a legal right, not a privilege. What Gidhgram provided is that spiritual democracy—the belief that every citizen can access the divine equally—is still possible. But it must be enforced by law and embraced by society.

### Reimagining Sacred Spaces

Gidhgram’s transformation offers a profound insight into the dynamics of sacred spaces and their social implications. The Gidheshwar Shiva Temple, once a symbol of exclusion, has now become a beacon of inclusivity. This evolution prompts a re-evaluation of other sacred sites across Bengal and India, encouraging a broader discussion on equitable access to religious spaces.

### Policy Implications and Recommendations

The events in Gidhgram highlight the necessity for robust policies addressing caste-based discrimination in religious contexts. Recommendations include:

- Legislative Measures: Enacting laws that mandate non-discriminatory access to all public religious spaces.
- Educational Programs: Implementing statewide educational initiatives to sensitize communities about the harmful impacts of caste-based exclusions.
- Monitoring Committees: Establishing independent bodies to oversee and address complaints related to caste discrimination in religious institutions.

### Conclusion

The temple entry in Gidhgram is more than a localized event; it is a microcosm of the broader struggle for equality and justice in India. While challenges remain, the courage of the Muchi community and the supportive intervention of authorities serve as a testament to the possibilities of change. This incident not only alters the social fabric of Gidhgram but also contributes to the ongoing discourse on caste, religion, and equality in India.

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# Dr Ambedkar's contribution to women empowerment

Women are an indispensable part of society. They carry out a number of responsibilities both within families as well as outside. However, they have not been given their due honour and respect. History has witnessed innumerable atrocities being committed against women time and again. They have been victims of sexual and physical abuse, rape, female foeticide and infanticide, child marriage, dowry, domestic violence, sati, trafficking, acid attack, exploitation at work place, unequal pay for equal work, economic and emotional abuse, and obscenity and pornography to name a few. This is primarily because the society is patriarchal in its thinking and actions. It believes in the gendered division of roles between men and women which confines the latter to the four walls of the house.

Dr Jayshree



In India, during the British period, number of legislations were enacted to ameliorate the position of women such as Bengal Sati Regulation Act 1829, Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act 1856, Age of Consent Act 1860 and 1891, Female Infanticide Prevention Act of 1870 and Hindu Woman's Right to Property Act 1937. At the same time, several Indians also worked hard to improve the position of women in Indian society. Social and religious reformers such as Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand, Mahadev Gobind Ranade, Veerasalingam Pantulu, Pandita Ramabai, Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule strongly advocated for women's rights and emancipation.

## Dr Ambedkar and His Contribution to Women Empowerment

Dr Ambedkar deserves a special mention here. He was and remains to be one of the most influential individuals that India has ever seen. Ambedkar was not only the father of the Indian constitution; he was also a great freedom fighter, political leader, philosopher, economist, social reformer, revivalist of Buddhism and a staunch advocate of women empowerment. He talked about comprehensive development of women with special emphasis on their





education and socio-political and economic rights. He believed that it was imperative to maintain and promote the dignity of every woman living in Indian society. Throughout his life, Dr Ambedkar worked tirelessly to ensure that women had equal access to liberty and justice like the men in Indian society. Dr Ambedkar took several initiatives in order to highlight and change the depressing conditions of women in India.

Some of these measures have been discussed in the following paragraphs. Newspapers 'Mook Nayak' and 'Bahishkrit Bharat' Dr Ambedkar read the Hindu Shastras, Smritis and other scriptures in order to analyse the oppression of women. In the decade of 1920s and 1930s, he took several steps to highlight the degrading position of women such as launching Mahad Satyagraha, burning of Manusmriti, launching temple entry movements and publishing newspapers. In particular, he began two newspapers - Mook Nayak (1920) and Bahishkrit Bharat (1927) to question the then existing social system in the Hindu society. The main objective of writing and publishing these newspapers was to understand the different kinds of atrocities that were being committed against the untouchables and advocate the various ways of their liberation. These newspapers covered many of the aspects of women's lives – rights, education, economic status, marriage and equality between men and women. Through these newspapers, he asked the women to question and fight against their oppression.

#### **Maternity Benefit Act, 1929**

The Maternity Benefit Act of 1929 was a significant legislation of pre-independent India which particularly dealt with the need to secure women's rights related to childbirth in the workplace. This legislation was made with contributions from Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, N.M. Joshi, and M.K. Dixit, who actively advocated for its passage in the legislature. The Maternity Benefit Act, which catered to the needs of women working in certain industries, was amended twice under the leadership of Dr Ambedkar. The first major amendment, passed on July 23, 1943, explained ambiguities present in Section 5 of the Act, which impacted the advantages available to women labourers. The second amendment, passed on April 4, 1945, introduced significant improvements in the benefits and the duration of authorized leave for women working in underground mines. Under the amended provisions, the period of maternity benefits for women working underground mines was increased to 16 weeks, with 10 weeks granted before confinement and


six weeks after confinement.

Moreover, the period of authorized leave was extended to a full 26 weeks, with 10 weeks allowed for partial work (no more than four hours a day) in cases where creches were not available, and a more flexible arrangement for those working in mines. The wage payments were also improved, with women working on the surface receiving Rs. 0.75 per day, and women working underground receiving Rs. 6 per week. These amendments reflected a growing recognition by Dr Ambedkar of the need to support women workers in striking a balance between their work and family responsibilities.

#### **Hindu Code Bill**

In Hinduism, certain issues such as inheritance, marriage and adoption were governed by two different sets of laws - Mitakshara and Dayabhaga. These laws were biased against women. Hence, Dr Ambedkar tabled the Hindu Code Bill in the Constituent Assembly in April 1947 with the following important provisions.

- Women will have the legal right to claim separate maintenance from her husband on grounds of infidelity, cruelty, or abandonment.
- The daughter was given an equal share of her father's and her husband's property in order to ensure that men and women were treated equally. With the exception of the son, she was regarded as a full heir, along with the son's widow.
- An adopted kid would not be able to deprive his mother of her late husband's possessions prior to his adoption.
- Two types of marriage were established: civil and non-civil, or sacramental. As divorce was made easier, civil marriage provided the most personal freedom.
- In order to restore women's dignity as human beings in society, polygamy was prohibited and instead monogamy was prescribed.
- Women were given the same legal rights as men.
- The property which was given to her by her parents as a dowry on her marriage would be treated as trust property. She would be entitled to claim it when she reached the age of eighteen.
- Woman's right to inherit property was declared to be absolute and not dependent on circumstances.
- A woman's partial estate would be turned into a complete estate so that she might do anything with it.



I measure the progress  
of a community by the  
degree of progress  
which women have  
achieved.

B. R. AMBEDKAR

The Hindu Code Bill questioned the intellectual foundations of the patriarchy that supported the subjection of women. But it was in direct conflict with the Hindu Orthodoxy and thus it was rejected and withdrawn. In 1955–56, when Ambedkar was not in cabinet, the Hindu Code Bill was reintroduced in sections and with some changes, it was passed as four separate acts: the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, and the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956.

#### **Provisions in the Indian Constitution for Women**

Dr Ambedkar was the pioneer of the Constitution of India. It is a comprehensive document that reflects the aspirations of citizens of India. Among its many provisions, the Constitution has laid down an effective framework to ensure gender equality and women empowerment. These provisions have been formulated to safeguard women against discrimination, promote their well-being and ensure their equal participation in the political, economic and social arenas. Some of these important provisions include the following.

- Article 14 – Right to Equality
- Article 15 – Prohibition of Discrimination
- Article 16 – Equality of Opportunity in Matters of Public Employment
- Article 39(a) – Responsibility of the State to provide the right to an adequate means of livelihood to both men and women
- Article 39(d) – Equal pay for equal work for both men and women
- Article 39(A) – Promotion of justice on the basis of equal opportunity (Economic justice)

- Article 42 – Commitment of State to ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief for women
- Article 51(e) – Moral obligations of every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women
- Articles 243-D (3), 243-D (4), 243-T (3) and 243-T (4) – Reservation for women in local bodies

The above-mentioned constitutional provisions for women in India are a testament of Dr Ambedkar's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. By guaranteeing them, the Constitution has laid down an efficient context for promoting the rights and interests of women.

#### **Conclusion**

Dr Ambedkar is best remembered for his efforts to uplift the untouchables in India as well as for his contribution to the drafting of the Constitution of India. But equally important has been his thoughts and actions with regard to the empowerment of women. He believed that the advancement of women held the key to the advancement of society. Through his several initiatives, he worked towards restoring the lost honour and glory to women of all castes and classes. In fact, Dr Ambedkar's progressive thinking paved the way for many of the contemporary policies for women development.

Taking cue from Ambedkar's initiatives, the Government of India has enacted several legislations and introduced various schemes in the last few decades to contribute to the welfare of women such as Sati Prevention Act 1987, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, the Family Courts Act 1984, Protection of Human Right Act 1993, Maternity Benefit Act 1961, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, National Commission for Women Act 1990, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) 2013, Maternity Benefit Amendment Act 2017, the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) 2019, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Scheme for concessional loans to women, UJJAWALA scheme, Mahila e-Hart which is an online platform for women entrepreneurs and Women Reservation Act 2023. Dr Ambedkar's thought on women is and will continue to be relevant, and hence it is to be celebrated and followed in the times to come.

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Ritika




## Dr Ambedkar on international relations

**Dr Ambedkar was critical of Nehru's foreign policy as it was overly idealistic and lacked strategic clarity. Taking the Kashmir issue to the UN, according to him, was a strategic failure, compromising with India's autonomy to resolve its internal issues. He was also critical of India joining the Non-Alignment Movement as it didn't address the core needs of the Indian people.**

### Deviation from the Idealists

Dr B.R. Ambedkar's views on social, political and economic issues are well-pronounced and widely discussed in discourses involving just and egalitarian society. However, his thoughts on India's foreign relations were not mentioned within foreign policy discourse until recently, when our approach towards foreign relations was taking a more pragmatic stance dominated by national interest and the principle of self-reliance or 'Atamirbharta'. Dr Ambedkar used a pragmatic approach to India's foreign policy long back when it was dominated by idealism, making his thoughts on India's foreign relations way ahead of their times. The Indian leaders at that time, like Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, were leaning more towards the idealist side.

Most of the leaders were prioritising and pursuing ideologically akin global partners, and doing so often put practical thinking and national interests at the back seat. Dr Ambedkar, on the other hand, encouraged a balanced approach. To him, foreign policy served a dual purpose: securing core national interests and



promoting global peace. He stressed the utility of foreign policy as a tool to promote economic justice and world peace and uphold values of morality and humanity. Distinguishing himself from the stance of idealists, to whom justice, peace and humanity seemed to be ideals, Dr Ambedkar viewed these as the normal functioning aspects of both the national and international systems, which are detrimental to growth and development.

### **Influences on his thoughts on International Relations**

His thoughts on international relations are rooted in the domestic and external situations that India was confronted with soon after independence, while his pragmatism is influenced by his education at the leading global universities, where he came across many Western thinkers who were shaped by Liberal and Realist traditions. In addition to this, the long period of British imperialism created apprehensions in his mind regarding depending excessively on Western powers, as it could make India fall back into patterns of dependency and external control from which the freedom fighters fought hard to emerge. The Economic lens in his outlook towards both domestic and foreign policy is yet another important aspect that dictated his standing in International Relations. His father, Ramoji Sakpal, was a part of the Indian military, which shaped his understanding of security, and he was quick to notice the changing orientation of global powers towards realism marked by the two major world wars. It was one of the reasons behind his tilt towards realism post-independence, where he started believing that communist and consumerist values can do more harm than good as they are rooted in power and greed. He prioritised economic policies and foreign relations that prioritise human dignity and social equality; without them, no country can truly progress, as abandoning these core values will torment the basis of a just society. He believed India should adapt its approach to changing times in order to survive in a dynamic world.

Post-Independence India was confronted with multiple challenges on the neighborhood front involving Pakistan, China, Sri Lanka, and Burma (now Myanmar). His views on International Relations were influenced by the ideas of Bismark and Bernard Shaw, which shaped his pragmatic thoughts. Speaking of them once, he said, "When I think of our foreign policy, I am reminded of what Bismark and Bernard Shaw have said. Bismark has said that "politics is not a game of realising the

ideal. Politics is the game of the possible," He believed Indian Foreign policy was functioning quite opposite to it being on the idealistic side, which can bring challenges in the future.

### **Critique of Nehruvian Foreign Policy**

Dr Ambedkar was critical of Nehru's foreign policy as it was overly idealistic and lacked strategic clarity. Taking the Kashmir issue to the UN, according to him, was a strategic failure, compromising with India's autonomy to resolve its internal issues. He was also critical of India joining the Non-Alignment Movement as it didn't address the core needs of the Indian people. Neutrality sidelined India in the global affairs. India should adopt a vocal and assertive foreign policy and prioritise its social and economic interests instead of choosing to maintain neutrality and strike a balance between the two superpowers. He argued for a more decisive foreign policy, advocating for clear alliances with either democratic or communist blocs, prioritising alignment with democratic nations to safeguard India's national interests against authoritarian influence. His exclusion from key defence and foreign policy committees limited his capacity to contribute to policy formation.

His discontent with the policies of the prime minister is reflected in his resignation speech delivered on September 27, 1951, wherein he mentioned the reasons behind his resignation, one of them being his dissatisfaction with foreign policy. Expressing his concerns in his resignation speech, he said, "The matter which has given me cause, not merely for dissatisfaction but for actual anxiety and even worry, is the foreign policy of the country.

Anyone who has followed the course of our foreign policy and, along with it, the attitude of other countries towards India, could not fail to realise the sudden change that has taken place in their attitude towards us..... after four years, all our friends have deserted us. We have no friends left. We have alienated ourselves. We are pursuing a lonely furrow with no one even to second our resolutions in the U.N.O."

On the China question, Dr Ambedkar was also apprehensive about China's intentions and India trusting China blindly. Driven by the idealistic narrative of Hindi Chini Bhai-Bhai, the Indian side missed reading between the lines, whereas Dr Ambedkar was quick to predict the future way before the Sino-Indian war of 1962 caught the delusion of Indian leaders off guard. Dr Ambedkar was a true strategist of his times; he stressed 'the strategic importance of Tibet as a buffer state between India and



China,' where Tibet was a stabilising factor ensuring India's security. He was of the view that by letting the Chinese troops take over Tibet, Indian leadership has, in a way, planted seeds of their own challenges, bringing Chinese troops near to its border. He also critiqued the Panchsheel Agreement signed by India and China in 1954, as the underlying principles had their underpinnings/ roots in the Buddhist tradition. He believed the same China that committed atrocities towards Buddhists in their country; one cannot expect it to comply with the Buddhist ideals in the Panchsheel.

He could foresee China's aggressive and expansionist policies that would lead to future conflicts; his assumptions were validated by the future events of the 1962 Indo-China war and the 2020 Galwan Crisis. He favoured aligning with democracies and forming a league of democracies in Asia to balance the rise of Communist and Autocratic regimes.



### Views on Self-Reliance

Dr Ambedkar was a strong advocate of Self-reliance or Atamirbharta. Post-Independence India was engulfed with a food crisis and overly dependent on the U.S. for food imports; he stressed the necessity to reform the agricultural and industrial system to minimise dependency on the West, maintain harmony in the region and promote regional trade with neighbours like Pakistan, China, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh as a stable and reliable neighborhood was important for newly independent India. He particularly stressed self-reliance on Agriculture and Industry as Agricultural reforms will lead to more production of raw materials for the industries and promote industrial development to create more jobs domestically, thereby minimising dependence upon external assistance. Which in turn will promote economic stability and National Pride. There's a contrast between

the Atamirbharta in India's Foreign Policy of today and the one advocated by Dr Ambedkar; despite a multitude of sectors included in today's self-reliant India, the defence sector is the one which is more stressed, whereas he stressed the socio-economic and development sectors more. This contrast is mainly due to the brief time period that he got to witness after the independence, and India had to cope with multiple wars and domestic security challenges soon after, which made it imperative to make security a priority area to ensure lasting peace and uninterrupted development. His vision was that India's foreign relations should not just pursue its national interest but also ensure and promote peace, justice, and equality for all.

Despite their timeline, his thoughts still hold relevance, and they are more so than they were when he first articulated them, especially in the context of India's changing role in the world. His emphasis on strategic autonomy and India's asserting freedom in its foreign policy choices is more relevant than ever in today's changing scenario while the geo-political alignments remain in a state of flux. He was of the view that becoming too entangled and dependent on any of the great powers would undermine India's independence. This policy is currently practised by India, where instead of aligning completely with great powers, it balances its relations with them. Dr Ambedkar's ideas of economic diplomacy and self-sufficiency are reflected in the current initiatives like "Make in India". Where the nation is determined more than ever to reduce dependency on the external world and develop local industries to grow India's manufacturing base, his dream of using foreign trade to advance national interests is the underlying principle of present economic policies. His critique of imperialism and colonial legacies and forming a coalition of democratic countries is the need of the hour in today's world, where this pragmatism can help navigate potential challenges and negotiate common concerns such as regional disputes, climate change, terrorism, and global inequality. His values rooted in justice, strategic vision, and national sovereignty remain the source of inspiration and guidance for India's foreign policy in the 21st century. His legacy reminds us of the need to balance international relations with ethics, moral values and long-term national interests.

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Dr B.R. Ambedkar’s contributions to foreign diplomacy may not have been direct, but his influence on global social justice movements is undeniable.

His fight against caste oppression in India resonated deeply with the struggles against racial segregation in the U.S. and beyond. The principles he championed—equality, justice, and human dignity—continue to inspire global human rights movements.



Dr Ambedkar



W.E. Burghardt Du Bois



Martin Luther King Jr.

# Dr Ambedkar’s contribution to foreign diplomacy

Prof. Dr. Anu



Dr B.R. Ambedkar was not only a social reformer and economist but also a visionary thinker, whose ideas on justice, equality and human rights had global significance. His relentless advocacy against untouchability and caste-based discrimination found parallels in struggles against racial segregation worldwide, particularly in the United States. His vision for a just society, rooted in the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, influenced international movements and policies concerning human rights and social justice.

## Influence on Global Social Justice Movements

Dr Ambedkar’s relentless fight against caste-based discrimination extended beyond India and resonated deeply with global

movements for social justice. His philosophy and activism found strong echoes in the African-American civil rights movement in the United States. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and W.E.B. Du Bois, who fought against racial segregation, recognized Dr Ambedkar’s struggle as a parallel to their own. His advocacy for equal rights and dignity for the oppressed classes in India served as an inspiration for similar battles against racial discrimination worldwide.

## Dr Ambedkar’s Ideals and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement

The core principles of Dr Ambedkar’s philosophy—dignity, equality, and social justice—were reflected in landmark legal and social developments in the United States. The historic *Brown v. Board of*



Education (1954) Supreme Court ruling, which declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, echoed Dr Ambedkar's arguments against the caste system and untouchability. Just as Dr Ambedkar fought for the fundamental rights of Dalits in India, this ruling sought to ensure equal educational opportunities for African-American children.

Similarly, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin, embodied principles that Dr Ambedkar had long championed in India. His ideas on social justice and legal protections for marginalized communities found strong resonance in this landmark legislation, reflecting the universality of his vision for human rights and equality.

### **Dr Ambedkar's Role in Shaping India's Foreign Policy on Social Justice**

While Dr Ambedkar's primary focus was on domestic social reforms, his thoughts on justice and equality had broader implications for India's foreign relations. He envisioned an India that not only championed social justice within its borders but also stood as a moral force against oppression worldwide. His belief in human rights as a universal principle aligned with emerging global discourses at institutions like the United Nations.

Dr Ambedkar's vision laid the groundwork for India's advocacy of anti-colonialism and support for oppressed communities across the world. His insistence on constitutional safeguards for marginalized groups in India set an example for other newly independent nations grappling with issues of social hierarchy and discrimination. His influence indirectly contributed to India's position as a nation that stood for equality and social justice in global forums.

### **Anti-Caste Movements in the United Kingdom**

Dr Ambedkar's ideas on caste-based discrimination also influenced anti-caste movements abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom, where many South Asian immigrants, including Dalits, faced discrimination. One notable instance was the Dalit Liberation Movement in the UK, which brought attention to caste discrimination within the South Asian diaspora. In 2010, the UK government recognized caste discrimination as a form of social injustice, a step forward in legal acknowledgment influenced by Dr Ambedkar's advocacy for equality.

Canada, like the U.S. and the UK, has


a significant South Asian population, including Dalits who faced caste-based discrimination. Dr Ambedkar's teachings on social justice inspired various legal and advocacy efforts for the recognition of Dalit rights. In Canada, there were efforts to address caste discrimination, particularly in relation to employment and education. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has been approached on several occasions regarding caste-based discrimination, with reference to Dr Ambedkar's philosophy of equality. In 2013, Caste-Based Discrimination was acknowledged as a significant issue for Dalit immigrants in Canada.

**Dr Ambedkar's work continues to inspire legal battles, social movements, and human rights initiatives worldwide. His unwavering commitment to fighting caste-based discrimination has had a profound impact on legal systems, labor rights, and anti-discrimination policies across various countries. His philosophy of social justice and equality serves as a reminder of the universal need for fairness and equal treatment for all individuals, regardless of caste, race, or creed.**

### **South Africa and the Legacy of Apartheid: Parallels with Dr Ambedkar's Struggle**

Dr B.R. Ambedkar's fight against the entrenched system of untouchability in India bore striking similarities to the struggles against apartheid in South Africa. Both systems institutionalized discrimination, segregating communities based on rigid social hierarchies. Dr Ambedkar's ideological stance on equality, dignity, and justice resonated with global movements that sought to dismantle oppressive structures, including the anti-apartheid struggle.

The principles he championed—social justice, human rights, and the legal eradication of discrimination—found echoes in the efforts to abolish apartheid policies. His work inspired broader discourses on equality and civil rights worldwide, influencing thinkers



and activists engaged in similar battles against racial and caste-based oppression.

Following the end of apartheid, South Africa adopted its post-apartheid constitution in 1996, which enshrined the principles of equality before the law and the elimination of discrimination based on race, caste, gender, and other forms of social exclusion. This landmark document drew from global human rights movements, including those advocating for Dalit rights in India. The constitutional commitment to social justice in South Africa reflects a shared aspiration with Dr Ambedkar's lifelong mission—to create a just and equitable society free from systemic discrimination.

### **Australia – The Recognition of Caste Discrimination**

As in other Western nations, caste-based discrimination has emerged as a significant issue within Australia's growing South Asian diaspora. Dr B.R. Ambedkar's advocacy for Dalit rights has played a crucial role in shaping legal and policy discussions surrounding caste-based discrimination, particularly within employment, education, and social interactions. His principles of equality and justice have provided a foundation for activism and awareness campaigns addressing caste-related injustices in Australia.

In 2017, the issue of caste discrimination was formally raised in the Australian Parliament when a petition was submitted, highlighting instances of caste-based prejudice within the Indian and South Asian communities. This marked an important step in bringing caste discrimination into public and political discourse. The recognition and response to such petitions were influenced by global movements for social justice, including those inspired by Dr Ambedkar's lifelong struggle against systemic inequality.

As awareness of caste-based discrimination grows, advocacy groups and human rights organizations continue to call for explicit legal protections to ensure that caste does not become a barrier to equal opportunity and social inclusion in Australia. The discussions surrounding caste in Australia reflect broader global efforts to address caste oppression and ensure that Dr Ambedkar's vision of social justice extends beyond national boundaries.

### **International Efforts to Combat Caste-Based Discrimination in Workplaces**

International organizations, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), have played a significant role in advocating for

the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities in workplaces worldwide. Recognizing the deep-rooted challenges posed by caste-based discrimination, these organizations have worked towards establishing laws and policies that promote equal treatment, fair wages, and protection against exploitation.

One of the key areas of concern has been forced labor, where Dalit workers, particularly in South Asia, often face bonded labor conditions, hazardous working environments, and lack of access to legal recourse. The ILO has actively campaigned against such exploitative practices, pushing for stronger labor rights enforcement and protections for vulnerable workers.

Through global advocacy efforts, the ILO and other human rights organizations have influenced workplace policies, encouraging governments and corporations to implement anti-discrimination measures. These initiatives align with the broader struggle for social justice that Dr B.R. Ambedkar championed, ensuring that Dalits and other marginalized groups are granted dignity, security, and equal opportunities in the workforce.

### **Recognition of Dalit Rights in the United Nations**

The recognition of caste-based discrimination as a human rights issue has gained international attention, with the United Nations playing a crucial role in addressing the systemic exclusion faced by Dalits. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has periodically examined caste-based discrimination, acknowledging its severe impact on social and economic mobility.

International advocacy efforts, deeply influenced by Dr B.R. Ambedkar's legacy of social justice, have contributed to raising awareness about caste oppression at the global level. These efforts have led to various UN reports and resolutions that call for stronger protections for Dalits and other marginalized communities, urging governments to implement policies that promote equality and non-discrimination.

The UN has also worked alongside human rights organizations to push for legal frameworks that explicitly address caste as a form of discrimination. By integrating caste-related issues into broader discussions on human rights, labour rights, and social justice, the UN continues to play a vital role in amplifying the fight for Dalit rights on the global stage.





**Dr. Ambedkar Statue in**

**Columbia University**



### **Fighting Caste Discrimination in the Middle East (Gulf Countries)**

The issue of caste-based discrimination extends beyond South Asia and has been a concern in the Middle East, particularly in Gulf countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Many low-wage migrant workers in these countries come from Dalit and other marginalized backgrounds, facing exploitative labor conditions, wage theft, and social exclusion. International human rights organizations have actively campaigned to address these injustices, advocating for better labour protections and equal treatment for all workers, regardless of caste or nationality.

Inspired by Dr B.R. Ambedkar’s teachings on dignity and equality, these advocacy efforts have sought to highlight the systemic barriers Dalit workers face and push for reforms in labor laws. While some progress has been made through international pressure and legal reforms, challenges remain in ensuring fair treatment and workplace protections for all migrant workers.

#### **The Lasting Legacy of Dr Ambedkar**

Dr Ambedkar’s work continues to inspire legal battles, social movements, and human rights initiatives worldwide. His unwavering commitment to fighting caste-based discrimination has had a profound impact on legal systems, labor rights, and anti-discrimination policies across various countries. His philosophy of social justice and equality serves as a reminder of the universal need for fairness and equal treatment for all individuals, regardless of caste, race, or creed. Dr Ambedkar’s legacy endures as a guiding force in the ongoing global struggle for human rights and dignity.

#### **Conclusion**

Dr B.R. Ambedkar’s contributions to foreign diplomacy may not have been direct, but his influence on global social justice movements is undeniable. His fight against caste oppression in India resonated deeply with the struggles against racial segregation in the U.S. and beyond. The principles he championed—equality, justice, and human dignity—continue to inspire global human rights movements. His legacy serves as a bridge between India’s social reform movements and international struggles for justice, making him a global icon of social transformation and human rights advocacy.

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In 2022, the Social Studies Foundation (SSF) organized five conferences across Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Lucknow under the theme 'Scheduled Castes in Independent India: Present & Future'. These gatherings brought together Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors from various universities to discuss the strengths, challenges, as a community member our role to resolve the challenges and SC activities across the different universities by SC communities today. One recurring concern echoed across all five conferences was the limited access to Scheduled Caste students to Overseas Higher Education Scholarships offered by both Central and State Governments. Despite the existence of these schemes, many eligible students remain unaware of them, or face procedural and systemic hurdles in accessing the benefits. In response to this, SSF initiated a series of workshops focused specifically on Overseas Higher Education scholarships, aiming to guide and empower students through the application process. These workshops have begun to make a difference, but a broader, more coordinated effort is still required. Dr. Chandrashekhar, through this article, sheds light on the critical gaps that still remain in the system. He emphasizes the urgent need for proactive awareness campaigns by government bodies, improved accessibility of information, and student-friendly procedures. With the right outreach and support mechanisms, these scholarship schemes can truly fulfill their intended purpose—empowering Scheduled Caste students to pursue higher education abroad and contribute meaningfully to the nation's progress. The message is clear: the potential is immense, but it can only be realized through informed action and inclusive policy implementation.

## Bridging the Gap: Reforming Overseas Scholarships for Scheduled Caste Students in India

Dr. Chandrashekhar



The Government of India, along with several state governments, offers scholarships to Scheduled Caste (SC) students for pursuing higher education abroad. Initiatives like the National Overseas Scholarship (NOS) are designed to empower marginalized communities by providing them access to global academic opportunities. However, despite generous allocations, the actual utilization of these scholarships remains alarmingly low, primarily due to administrative bottlenecks, procedural hurdles, and systemic apathy.

### Key Challenges in Scholarship Utilization:

#### 1. Delays in Document Issuance by Local Authorities

Applicants often struggle with obtaining key documents like income and caste certificates, Solvency proofs, and domicile certificates. These delays, worsened by unsupportive or indifferent local officials, act as the first roadblock.

**Solution:** Digitize the process and designate nodal officers to ensure time-bound delivery of required documents through a single-window system.

#### 2. Income Ceiling Too Low

The current ₹8 lakh/year income cap excludes many students from lower-middle-

class families who still can't afford foreign education.

**Solution:** Raise the cap to ₹12–15 lakh or introduce a sliding-scale scholarship system to include more students in need.

#### 3. Repeated Rounds with No Eligible Applicants

Despite multiple rounds, many seats remain unfilled—not due to lack of merit, but due to procedural complexity and poor outreach.

**Solution:** Simplify application procedures and conduct preparatory workshops at universities, especially in SC-dominated areas.



#### 4. Poor Awareness Campaigns

Limited promotion of the scholarships results in universities and students being unaware of such schemes.

**Solution:** Launch nationwide awareness drives using social media, educational



networks, and university SC/ST cells.

### **5. Short Application Period**

One month (or in MP's case, 15 days) is insufficient to secure foreign admission and compile documentation.

**Solution:** Extend the window to 3–4 months and conduct two application rounds each year.

### **6. Lack of Pre-Application Guidance**

No structured mentoring or awareness sessions are organized to prepare students.

**Solution:** Set up help desks, mentorship programs, and regular webinars in coordination with SC/ST university cells and alumni.

### **7. Unconditional Admission Requirement**

Applicants must submit an unconditional offer letter from QS ranking 500 or below, often spending heavily on applications without any guarantee of receiving the scholarship.

**Solution:** Allow provisional applications or applications with conditional offers and reimburse expenses post-selection.

### **8. Risk of Financial Fraud and Debt**

Rejection of applications after incurring expenses can leave students under heavy debt or vulnerable to fraud.

**Solution:** Provide pre-departure counseling and link applicants with verified institutions and legal aid services.

### **9. Absence of Alumni Tracking**

There's no official record of past recipients or their current status, which limits mentorship and program evaluation.

**Solution:** Create a digital alumni network portal and encourage returning scholars to act as mentors or resource persons.

### **10. Restrictions on Part-Time Work**

Students are barred from earning additional income abroad, although the scholarship amount is often inadequate.

**Solution:** Align scholarship rules with host country laws and allow part-time work while increasing fellowship amounts periodically.

### **11. Delays in the disbursement**

Delays in the disbursement of funds are a significant problem for recipients of the National Overseas Scholarship for Scheduled Castes. Students have reported considerable delays in receiving their maintenance and contingency allowances, leading to financial strain and difficulties in covering basic living and academic expenses. The reimbursement process for contingency funds further burdens students who may lack upfront capital. These delays, sometimes attributed to bureaucratic processes and even national

events like elections, can force students to defer admissions or even lose university offers, severely impacting their academic progress and future opportunities.

The idea behind overseas scholarships for SC students is revolutionary—but its execution remains painfully flawed. Stories like those from Madhya Pradesh reflect not just administrative failure, but also systemic apathy toward the educational aspirations of marginalized communities.

To truly fulfill the goal of social mobility and global representation, the government must urgently:

Simplify and digitize processes, Widen eligibility and timelines, Increase outreach and support structures, and Ensure accountability and empathy in implementation.

Only then can these scholarships become transformative tools, enabling deserving SC students to thrive globally and return as change-makers for India.

### **"Case Study: Madhya Pradesh Government Scholarship (July 2024)"**

A glaring example of systemic exclusion is seen in the Madhya Pradesh Government's overseas scholarship scheme for SC students. In July 2023:

The application window was open for only 15 days.

The advertisement was published only in a Bhopal newspaper, completely ignoring other districts and major cities.

The application form could be obtained only through physical presence at the Bhopal office, making it inaccessible to students living far away, particularly those from rural or remote areas.

This restrictive and exclusionary approach appears to intentionally discourage eligible candidates from applying. Even among those who managed to qualify. Several struggled to pay the second installment of university fees and did not receive monthly stipends on time.

Due to the high cost of international travel and the policy of reimbursing only one flight ticket, these students are unable to return to India to personally pursue or escalate their case.

There are several complains and request are posted on the internet from the stucked students at foreign. This results in immense mental stress, academic instability, and in extreme cases, students dropping out or falling into debt traps.

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# 'Hard work and skilling are the keys to success'



Vishakha Bhaskkar married to Utkarsh Chaudhary, she is a Co-founder of Angrakhaa, a size-inclusive brand, reveals her success mantra to the Unheard Voices. When Vishakha Bhaskkar Chaudhary, a young entrepreneur from Delhi who belongs to the underprivileged class, says 'Hard work brings success' she is just summing up her own experience. With hard work, Vishakha scored 95 per cent marks in her Class 12 exams and grabbed 6th rank in the first entry list of the Delhi-based prestigious Shri Ram College of Commerce. After her graduation, she picked up a couple of jobs, only to acquire the skills. After that, she worked hard to set up her brand and raise it despite the COVID-19 pandemic. With incessant hard work she and her co-founder, Manipur's Asana Riamei, pitched their brand at the Shark Tank and secured Rs 40 lakhs in exchange for 5% equity, not to speak of the laurels from the sharks. Angrakhaa, which started with Rs 10,000 seed capital, recorded sales of Rs. 1.16 crore in the fiscal 2021-22. In this interview with the Unheard Voices, Vishakha recounted her journey to success...

**UV:** Could you please tell us about your family and educational background?

**VC:** I am from Delhi. I graduated in Economics (Commerce) from the Shri Ram College of Commerce. I scored 95 per cent in the Class 12 exam and got admitted to the SRCC in 2012. When I felt the course was not right for me, I changed my career path in the college itself. My mother Sunita is an advocate practicing in the district court at Saket. My father Satish Kumar is the Curator of the Nehru Museum. My younger brother Tushar has also started his own business recently. My husband also has his own sportswear brand.

**UV:** How did the idea of doing business come to your mind?

**VC:** The idea initially was not to do business.

During the second year of my degree course, I realised that economics is not for me. I started a fashion blog, writing about plus-size and mid-size fashion, and how you style if you are mid-sized. I connected to a lot of people throughout the world through my blog. They all were facing the same issue – when a brand is making clothes for a plus-size person, they only want to cover you up and not make you look good. The idea then was to help women style with whatever was available in the market. Gradually it developed into the brand Angrakhaa. Later, I learnt the nitty-gritty of manufacturing clothes and managerial skills. Immediately after returning from Mumbai in 2018, I started my own business.

**UV:** How do you choose the raw material?



**VC:** While working in Delhi and Mumbai, I learnt about different markets, different styles we can make, and from where to procure the fabric and raw material. I took the jobs only to learn. We mainly source our fabric from the Delhi market. From Jaipur we get a lot of block and print style. Sometimes we go to Surat.

**UV: What manpower do you have?**

**VC:** We have a very small team of about 10 people. We use technology a lot. We have an automated process. We make a good balance between the technology and the manpower that we have.

**UV: Where your setup is located?**

**VC:** We have two setups. One is in Delhi and the other is in Faridabad.

**UV: What was your seed capital?**

**VC:** The seed capital was very less. You would be surprised with this. We started this with Rs 10,000.

**UV: What was the assured client base when you started?**

**VC:** There was no assured client base. I just tried to hit the bull's eye. When I studied marketing during Covid, I realised the power of acquiring new clientele, and how to use money for ads.

**UV: What is the present turnover of your company?**

**VC:** I have to admit it is a little less than what it was previously. Things got changed last year. We both took a backseat, me due to my wedding and Asana became a mother. Both of us decided to give time for our personal lives. But right now, we are at Rs two crore.

**UV: How large is your customer base now?**

**VC:** We have already catered to more than one lakh people through our website. We are selling through other websites too. We get orders not only from India but also from the USA, UAE and Europe. We must have sent orders to every continent.

**UV: What difficulties did you face when you started this business?**

**VC:** We did not know the exact scale of orders we would be getting. When you are working, you work with one department and you know everything about it. But when you are doing your own business, you have to do everything yourself \_ from doing the designs and picking the fabric to running the ads and ensuring timely delivery of the orders. When we were hit by COVID-19, I dedicated the time to learn marketing. A woman starting business in a male dominated field faces different hurdles. She does not get the same type of respect readily. She has to build that trust. Seven to eight years back, when we started, e-commerce

platforms like Myntra and Flipkart had spoiled people with quick deliveries of bulk-produced garments. We are not a 'fast' fashion brand and we do not create in bulk. We are very mindful about what we are creating. Therefore, we have strict return and exchange policies. We try not to encourage people to think they will order something and then return. We don't want to solve one issue while adding to another issue.

**UV: Did you suffer any discrimination when you started the business?**

**VC:** Not me, but my partner faced it. Asana is from Tamenglong district, Manipur. She came to Delhi for her studies and later settled down here. If we both were going to talk to a vendor, the vendor would talk to me and not to her. There is a bias towards people from the North-East. People think people from the North-East are not meant to do a great job. But Asana has proved it wrong.

**UV: Have you faced gender-based bias from your colleagues and associates?**

**VC:** It happens more in manufacturing. I have that experience. When it happens, you have to do the balance of matching up with others to gain power and telling them very authoritatively that I am your boss. Women have to walk in a nutshell.

**UV: The business is dominated by caste bias too...**

**VC:** Unfortunately, yes. But thankfully, my background helps me. I have a SRCC background. This is something that I have worked on for years. I take pride in my background. I have no distress that I belong to this class. I feel lucky that I am one of the thousands and lakhs of people who do not get the opportunity to reach where I am. Of course, that also makes me sad.

**UV: What is your advice to the youths and budding entrepreneurs, especially of the underprivileged class?**

**VC:** I would urge both youngsters and parents to make good use of the internet. The Internet is accessible to everyone today. There is a lot of dirt on social media and if you can stay away from it, you can use the internet in many ways to learn. Skill development is the key to progress. Secondly, do not compare yourself with anyone. Do not take pride or do not feel sorry about the surname you get. Just grab the first opportunity that comes your way. There will be no going back` from there. The incentives we get are directly proportionate to our hard work. You have to be very smart in doing whatever you do.

*As told to Prasanna  
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# A Landmark Struggle for Social Justice

**M**ahad Satyagraha was a landmark movement led by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on 20th March 1927 to fight for the right of Dalits to use water from a public lake in Mahad. The Mahad Satyagraha, along with the Salt March, was among the most important events in the run-up to Independence.

While the Salt Satyagraha aimed for the liberation of the nation from foreign invaders, the Mahad Satyagraha aimed for national integration through social reform, breaking the shackles that bound Indian society from within and contributed to its subjection to foreign rule. A society that is disunited from within, whose members discriminate against one another, is easy prey for enemy nations.



The Mahad Satyagraha was a major step towards ensuring social justice for Dalits and the abolition of untouchability, which was finally achieved in the Constitution of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and adopted by the nation in 1950. The Satyagraha, thus, holds a special place in the memory of Dalits, as it was a key step in the direction of securing fundamental rights for the Dalit community.

In 1923, the Bombay Legislative Council passed a resolution moved by social reformer Shri Rao Bahadur S. K. Bole which allowed so-called 'untouchables' to use all public water sources, wells, and dharamshalas in the Presidency. This was confirmed by the Mahad City Council in the Konkan region of Maharashtra, which had thrown open the famous Chavdar Lake for the use of all communities. However, despite the legal measures taken, the Dalit communities were unable to access the lake due to the hostility of casteist elements.

Dr. Ambedkar, along with upper caste allies, such as Shri Surendranath Tipnis, organized a Depressed Classes Conference in Mahad. The conference was held on 19th March 1927, and several resolutions on the civil rights of 'untouchables', prohibition of untouchability, making the Bole resolution a reality, etc., were passed. Dr. Ambedkar spoke about the importance of "rooting out the ideas of highness and lowness" and asked the Dalits to attain self-elevation through regaining self-respect and

gaining self-knowledge.

As Dr. Ambedkar once said, "We must stand on our own feet and fight as best as we can for our rights. So carry on your agitation and organize your forces. Power and prestige will come to you through struggle." This spirit was clearly visible in the events that unfolded the next day.

The next day, i.e., 20th March 1927, the depressed classes under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar marched peacefully for access to water from the Chavdar Lake. Dr. Ambedkar began the demonstration by drinking water from the lake, followed by thousands of his followers. However, subsequently, casteists carried out 'purification rituals' at the lake, and there was an outbreak of violence due to rumours of Dalits planning to enter a temple. Dr. Ambedkar, undeterred by these attempts at intimidation, continued and further expanded the struggle, intensifying his efforts.

While the movement eventually had to be suspended following a court injunction, the Mahad Satyagraha was the catalyst for social and legal changes that eventually culminated in the abolition of untouchability upon Independence. In addition, it served as an undying source of inspiration for millions of Dalits to assert and claim their rights and fight for their rightful access to public spaces which had been denied to them.

Several Dalit entrepreneurs have commemorated the Mahad Satyagraha through their enterprises. Avichal Dhiwar, a Dalit businessman from Pune, launched bottled drinking water under the name "20th March Ventures Pvt Ltd" to honour the Mahad Satyagraha on January 26th 2017.

Notably, Shri Raja Nayak, the chairman of the DICCI Karnataka Chapter and a first-generation Dalit entrepreneur, started a packaged drinking water company called "Jala Drops." During an interview, he stated, "When an MNC comes in, it doesn't ask who produced this water—a Nayak or an upper-caste individual. If they sell it for ₹10 per bottle, I offer it for ₹9.50. That's business. That's what liberalisation brought about. Caste became insignificant—at least in a certain class."

On the occasion of Dalit History Month, which is linked to the birth anniversary of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, I personally feel that our Prime Minister should commemorate the Ambedkar Jayanti by launching a special edition of the Rail Neer water bottle for a year. The special edition may be named either



“Mahad Neer” or “Bheem Neer.” In the history of mankind, we find thousands of examples of wars for water. Either it was for the ownership of the water resource or establishing the rights on water. But in this history, only the Mahad Lake Satyagraha was just to touch the water.

Hence, it is symbolic of caste struggle and justice. In the journey, whoever will purchase the water bottle, I am sure his thirsty heart will be full of equality.

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## Telangana Assembly Passes Historic SC Sub-Categorisation Bill

The Telangana Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Bill, 2025, marking a historic milestone in equitable reservation distribution among 59 SC sub-castes. The Bill divides the constitutionally mandated 15% SC quota into three groups: Group I with 1%, Group II with 9%, and Group III with 5% reservations. The Bill was tabled by Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy hailed the day as historic, acknowledging the sacrifices of activists, particularly from the Madiga Reservation Poratta Samithi (MRPS), whose sub-caste will receive 9% reservation. He assured that families of those who lost their lives in the struggle for SC sub-categorisation would be compensated through housing and welfare schemes. The government plans to enhance SC quotas based on the 2026 census.

The Bill received unanimous support from all political parties, including Congress, BRS, BJP, and CPI. State Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy emphasized that the process was conducted transparently and addressed concerns of all SC groups.

## Mumbai Launches First Air-Conditioned Study Centre for Underprivileged Kids in Colaba

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has inaugurated a air-conditioned study centre in Colaba, designed to support underprivileged children. Developed with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funding, the facility is equipped with benches and a drinking water facility, accommodating up to 30 students at a time.

Located near the Badhwar Park, the centre aims to provide a cool and conducive environment for students from nearby slums, including Shiv Shakti Nagar and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Nagar, to study and prepare for exams during the hot summer months. It will operate from 11 am to 6:30 pm daily. Former

Corporator Makarand Narwekar highlighted that this initiative addresses the need for upgrading existing facilities and plans are underway to establish similar centres across Mumbai.

## AP Targets 2 Million Rooftop Solar Units, Full Subsidies for SC/ST

Andhra Pradesh has set an ambitious goal to install 2 million rooftop solar units by the end of 2025, with a focus on promoting renewable energy and empowering marginalized communities. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu announced plans to install 10,000 rooftop solar units in each Assembly constituency under the PM Surya Ghar scheme.

The initiative includes significant subsidies for underprivileged households. SC/ST beneficiaries will receive full subsidies for



setting up 2-kilowatt rooftop units, with the Central government covering Rs 60,000 and the State contributing Rs 55,000. Backward Class beneficiaries will receive Rs 60,000 from the Central government and Rs 20,000 from the State, with the option to secure a Rs 35,000 bank loan repayable over five years.

Households will not only benefit from using the generated electricity but can also sell surplus power back to the grid at Rs 2.90 per unit, providing an additional income source. This move aligns with Andhra Pradesh's broader strategy to become a leader in renewable energy, aiming for 50% of its electricity capacity from non-fossil fuels by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2047.

*Compiled by Prajvalant.  
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# DIN VISHESH



## Buddha Pournima

12th May Buddha Pournima

**B**uddha Purnima, also known as Vesak, is a significant festival for Buddhists worldwide, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and death anniversary of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. It falls on the full moon day in the month of Vaisakha, which generally occurs in May.

On this day, Buddhists celebrate the remarkable life of Siddhartha Gautama, who was born in Lumbini (modern-day Nepal). His journey from a prince to an enlightened being is the foundation of Buddhist teachings. The day also marks his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, India, where he attained profound wisdom and became the Buddha. Moreover, Buddha Purnima honors his passing into Parinirvana in Kushinagar, India, signifying the end of his earthly existence and the culmination of his spiritual journey.

Buddha Purnima is observed through various religious practices such as visiting temples, offering prayers, and lighting candles and incense. Many Buddhists engage in acts of kindness, charity, and meditation to embody the teachings of the Buddha on this day. It is also an occasion for reflection on his core teachings of peace, compassion, and the path to enlightenment. Buddha Purnima unites people across cultures in reverence for the Buddha's message of harmony and understanding.



14th April  
Dr Ambedkar  
Birth Anniversary



23rd April  
Vitthal Ramji Shinde  
Birth Anniversary



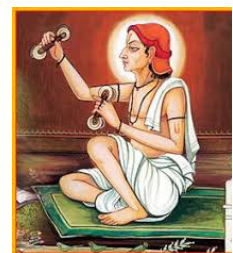
30th April  
Mahatma Basveshwar  
Birth Anniversary



30th April  
Rashtrasant  
Tukdoji Maharaj  
Birth Anniversary



6th May  
Chhatrapati  
Shahu Maharaj  
Death Anniversary



12th May  
Bhakt Kavi Narsi Mehta  
Birth Anniversary

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