A New India : Increasing Inter-Caste Marriages

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EDITORIAL

Say No To Neo Imperialism

The trade tensions between the United States and India during the presidency of Donald Trump represented more than just a disagreement over import and export duties. The so-called "tariff war" had far-reaching consequences, especially for sectors like agriculture, which forms the backbone of rural India. For millions of Indians, particularly from deprived communities, the policies born from these tensions threatened not only livelihoods but also the very principles of self-reliance and dignity that India has aspired to since independence.

When the Trump administration adopted a hardline protectionist approach, it withdrew India's preferential trade status under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) in 2019. This reversal meant Indian exports—especially in products like agricultural goods, textiles, and certain industrial components—faced higher tariffs in the U.S. market. In retaliation, India raised tariffs on a number of American goods, including agricultural imports such as almonds, apples, and pulses. While these steps appeared balanced diplomatically, the deeper implications for the Indian rural economy were troubling.

Even though much of the media attention focused on manufactured goods and technology sectors, agriculture bore the brunt of uncertainty. The Trump administration's push for greater U.S. agricultural exports into India— particularly dairy, poultry, and genetically modified crops — posed direct competition to Indian farmers. A trade deal on U.S. terms risked opening India's markets to heavily subsidized American products, making it nearly impossible for small and marginal Indian farmers to compete. This is not just a matter of market competition; it's about survival. The entry of cheaper, bulk American produce could further depress domestic prices, leaving local farmers with reduced incomes and increased debt burdens.

India's rural economy is not evenly spread in terms of opportunity. The majority of deprived communities continue to depend upon agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Marginal farmers, landless labourers, and small-scale cultivators—many belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes—form the bulk of the agricultural workforce. Any shock to the farming sector disproportionately impacts these groups, pushing them deeper into poverty and economic insecurity.

When trade policies favour large, corporate agriculture—whether foreign or domestic—the weakest players in the supply chain inevitably pay the highest price. For deprived communities, agriculture is not just a profession; it is tied to cultural identity, social networks, and local economies. Undermining it with one-sided trade agreements risks dismantling a fragile ecosystem that sustains millions.

If U.S. agricultural imports enter Indian markets at subsidized rates, the possible hardships of deprived communities will be severe and multi-dimensional. Firstly, falling crop prices could erode farmers' already thin profit margins, forcing them into cycles of debt and distress sales of land. Secondly, rural employment could shrink as local agricultural activities decline, triggering mass migration to urban areas, where jobs are scarce and living conditions precarious. Additionally, the erosion of local agriculture would also mean the loss of food sovereignty—India's ability to control what it grows and consumes. Dependence on foreign food imports in essential sectors could leave the country vulnerable to price manipulation, supply chain disruptions, and geopolitical pressures.

Trade deals under unequal terms are not new in history. Colonial India's forced integration

into British trade networks devastated its local industries, locking the economy into dependence. Similarly, a one-sided trade agreement favouring U.S. agribusiness is a new manifestation of new imperialism and new slavery. Instead of direct political control, this modern form of domination operates through market rules, intellectual property laws, and tariff structures that benefit powerful nations while keeping weaker economies dependent. The imposition of unequal trade conditions will seriously harm principles of economic and other types of freedom. True economic freedom is not simply the ability to buy and sell—it includes the right of a nation to safeguard its productive sectors, protect vulnerable populations, and decide its own development path. When a country's agricultural sector becomes dominated by foreign imports, its farmers lose bargaining power, its policy space shrinks, and its food systems become vulnerable to external shocks. This loss of autonomy extends beyond economics—it weakens political independence, erodes cultural traditions, and undermines social stability. The struggle for India's independence was not only about removing colonial rulers; it was about reclaiming dignity and self-respect. Against self-esteem, for which Dr. Ambedkar stood, are policies that reduce India to a subordinate player in global trade, dependent on powerful nations for its essential needs. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar championed the cause of the marginalized, advocating for economic safeguards that would empower the deprived to live with dignity. Dr Ambedkar, time and again, expressed concern about economic drain and

exploitation by British Rule as its policies were drafted for the benefit of its own country. He strongly believed that deprived communities were the first natural victims of imperialism and add to the existing social inequalities. Rulers and people of this country ought to remember this all the time to protect themselves from a new manifestation of slavery.

Trade policies that sacrifice the interests of India's poorest in favour of foreign corporate gains run counter to this vision. Self-esteem in the economic sphere means protecting local industries, encouraging self-reliance, and ensuring that no community is left defenceless in the face of global competition. The tariff war initiated by the Trump administration against India was more than a temporary diplomatic standoff—it was a test of India's resolve to protect its economic sovereignty. While retaliatory tariffs and negotiations dominated headlines, the deeper story lay in the silent fields of rural India, where farmers and labourers faced an uncertain future. A trade deal shaped by unequal power dynamics risks inflicting lasting damage on Indian agriculture, especially for the deprived communities that depend on it. By prioritizing short-term diplomatic wins over long-term rural stability, such agreements open the door to economic dependency—a modern echo of imperialism.

India's path forward must honour the principles of self-reliance, dignity, and fair opportunity for all citizens. Anything less would be a betrayal of the hard-won freedom and self-esteem that leaders like Dr. Ambedkar envisioned for the nation.

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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A Welcome Sign : Increasing Number of Inter-Caste Marriage

A significant proportion of today's youth perceives marriage as a pure union of two individuals, regardless of caste, class, or religion. Educational institutions and urban environments often facilitate social mixing across caste lines, creating networks that prioritize shared values and emotional compatibility over traditional endogamous restrictions.

Chandrashekhar & Tanishka

Since the earliest stages of human society, marriage has evolved beyond a private arrangement to become a fundamental social institution, shaped by the intertwined forces of biology and culture. From an evolutionary perspective, the significant expansion of cranial capacity in early hominins created an obstetric dilemma, necessitating the birth of infants at a more premature stage. This compromise, while allowing for increased brain development (encephalization), also produced offspring who were highly vulnerable and dependent, thereby generating selective pressure for prolonged parental investment and cooperative care.

To meet these challenges, the emergence of stable pair-bonding proved advantageous, as it facilitated shared responsibilities in nurturing, protection, and provisioning. Over time, this biologically grounded strategy for survival became ritualized and institutionalized, giving rise to the enduring and diverse institution we now understand as marriage. Anthropologist Edward Westermarck argued that marriage is not simply a product of religious dogma or legal invention, but a natural outcome of evolutionary processes. He traced its origins to fundamental human needs, emotional attachment, sexual pairing, and the coordinated care of offspring which, in his view, rendered marriage a near universal phenomenon, albeit

one expressed through culturally variable forms.

The institution of marriage

Marriage is a socially approved union between individuals that establishes rights and obligations concerning sex, reproduction, and kinship. Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss viewed marriage as a form of reciprocal exchange, where women are exchanged between groups to create alliances, forming the basis of social structure. Bronisław Malinowski emphasized its role in child-rearing and socialization, noting that marriage ensures legitimacy of offspring and stable family life. According to Edward Westermarck, marriage is a "more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation," highlighting its biological and emotional dimensions. Sociologist Emile Durkheim saw marriage as a moral institution that reflects and reinforces the collective conscience of society.

Is marriage universal?

Marriage is considered functionally universal but not uniform across cultures. Most societies have some form of socially sanctioned union to regulate sexuality, reproduction, and kinship. George Peter Murdock (1949) argued that marriage is universal, as all societies have institutionalized pair-bonding and child-rearing arrangements. However, Kathleen Gough and others noted exceptions, such as the Nayar of Kerala, where formal marriage was absent, yet kinship and reproduction were still socially organized. Thus, while the functions of marriage exist everywhere, the structure varies, and structural marriage is not absolutely universal.

Institution of marriage in India

One cannot understand inter-caste marriages in India without first examining the broader framework of the Indian marriage system itself. It is a legally and culturally pluralistic institution shaped by layers of religion, caste, kinship, and regional traditions. Marriages in India are governed by community-specific personal laws such as Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Parsi laws, each rooted in distinct religious worldviews. Alongside these, the Special Marriage Act 1954 stands as a secular legal provision that enables individuals to marry outside the confines of religion and caste. It is this act that forms the primary legal route for most inter-caste and interfaith marriages, offering a civil and constitutional alternative to customary norms. Traditionally, however, marriage in India has been arranged and caste endogamous, functioning as a powerful tool for preserving social hierarchies. As sociologist Andre Beteille observes, "marriage has been the chief mechanism through which caste boundaries are maintained in Indian society." In agreement, G. S. Ghurye, the scholar of caste studies, argued that 'caste endogamy is the essence of the caste system, enabling its transmission across generations'. Indian political activist, V.D. Savarkar, in his 'Jatyuchhedak Nibandh', noted that "The Varna system has turned into a birth-based tyranny. We must reform it... It is not birth but worth that should decide one's place in society".

Furthermore, the marital ideologies themselves vary across communities. Hindu marriages are typically viewed as sacramental, emphasizing dharma (duty), ritual purity, and social order. While monogamy is legally mandated across most legal systems in India, Islamic personal law continues to permit limited polygyny, adding further complexity to the plural nature of Indian marriage. This socio-legal diversity makes the act of marrying outside one's caste not merely a personal choice but a quiet act of social defiance, one that challenges long-standing structures of purity, hierarchy, and identity.

Inter-caste Marriage in Contemporary India

"I am convinced that the real remedy is intermarriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount, the separatist feeling, the feeling of being aliens, created by caste will not vanish." B.R. Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition

Inter-caste marriage refers to a marital union between individuals belonging to different caste groups, thereby challenging the traditional norm of endogamy, the practice of marrying within one's own caste. Such unions disrupt hereditary social boundaries and confront deeply embedded systems of ritual purity, social hierarchy, and exclusion that underpin the Indian caste structure (Ambedkar, 1936; Dumont, 1980; Jodhka & Shah, 2010).

Historically, intra-caste marriage has functioned as a foundational mechanism for the reproduction of caste, upheld across all strata of the social hierarchy. Marriage, as a social institution, has not only served reproductive or kinship functions but has also been instrumental in reinforcing caste boundaries and sustaining caste-based privilege and discrimination. As recent as 2011, data from the India Human Development Survey indicated that only 5.86% of marriages in India were inter-caste, reflecting the persistent dominance of endogamy even in contemporary times.

This continued prevalence is largely attributed to the arranged marriage system,

Social Integration through Inter-Caste Marriages

Dr. Ambedkar

which remains the dominant form of mate selection in India. Within this structure, caste becomes a decisive criterion, often implicitly reinforced through community norms, family preferences, and matrimonial platforms. Factors such as preservation of familial honour, compliance with customary expectations, and maintenance of caste-based status hierarchies all converge to uphold intra caste marriage as the default social norm.

Caste is the ultimate site of social reproduction. The overemphasis of caste alone takes away the ultimate function of marriage which was to initially serve the purpose of procreation, now involves a manifold of factors, caste being the top one. And it does not stop there, along with caste, comes other sub factors such as family honour and community pressure, cultural and religious conditioning, maintenance, preserving social hierarchies, etc. The once elementary form of marriage hence becomes multi-layered, purely due to social constructs which lack rational backing.

It is reinforced by a web of interconnected factors such as family honour, community surveillance and the desire to maintain hierarchical social order. As a result, marriage becomes less a personal or biological union, and more a social performance, choreographed to align with caste norms. These constructs, while deeply rooted in tradition, often lack any rational or ethical justification, yet continue to dictate the most intimate decisions in an individual's life.

Caste endogamy plays a crucial role in preserving class privilege by ensuring the continuity of cultural capital. As Pierre Bourdieu argued, cultural capital includes language, manners, educational habits, and worldviews that are passed down through families and reinforced by marriage within similar social groups.

When people marry within their caste, they do not just preserve bloodlines, they preserve a shared cultural code that aligns with dominant norms. This helps maintain access to elite institutions, social networks, and opportunities, making caste endogamy a quiet but powerful tool for reproducing inequality.

Changing Trends in Inter Caste Marriage

1. Kapadia (1958) conducted a pioneering study on 513 university graduates across India and found that 51% of parents were open to the idea of inter-caste marriages. Only one third strictly opposed breaking caste barriers, indicating early signs of ideological shifts among the educated elite.

2. R.N. Agarwal (1984) came to similar conclusions in his study on Mumbai, reinforcing the idea that women's autonomy, particularly their right to choose their spouse, alongside educational attainment, were essential drivers of inter-caste marriages.

3. Saroja (1999) discovered that even among postgraduate students, support for inter-caste marriages remained only marginally positive, hinting at lingering social resistance.

4. Kannan (2002) conducted a study on 149 inter-caste marriages in Bombay city, revealing a steady increase in such unions since 1956.

His findings emphasized that higher female education, greater freedom in partner selection, and a higher age at marriage for women were key contributors to this rise.

5. T. Ramnivas (2002) studied patterns in Madras city and reported a marked increase in inter-caste marriages since the 1990s, aligning with broader social and economic changes during the post-liberalization period in India.

6. Choudhary (2013) added that inter caste marriages were more common among the educated urban population, suggesting that exposure, mobility, and access to diverse social networks contribute significantly to caste boundary crossing in marital decisions.

7. Naidu (2014), in a more recent study, found that Scheduled Castes exhibited the highest rates of inter-caste marriages compared to other caste groups. He identified urban residence, modern employment, education, and a middle-class economic background as crucial factors enabling these unions. Notably, he also observed that such marriages tend to occur at a relatively higher age, indicating delayed but conscious choices.

Youth Perspectives on Inter-Caste Marriage

As the younger generation advances through education and gains access to a wide dimension of global experiences, a seed of transformation has been planted within the social fabric of Indian society. The blurring of caste boundaries partly due to globalization, positive efforts of the state and the democratization of knowledge has contributed to more liberal attitudes among youth.

A significant proportion of today's youth perceives marriage as a pure union of two individuals, regardless of caste, class, or religion. Educational institutions and urban environments often facilitate social mixing across caste lines, creating networks that prioritize shared values and emotional compatibility over traditional endogamous restrictions.

Caste wise Inter caste Marriage Rates:

The distribution of inter-caste marriage rates across caste groups, as reflected in the India Human Development Survey II, shows notable variation. Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) each account for 21.6% of such marriages, while Other Forward Castes report a slightly higher proportion at 28.1%. Brahmins record the highest share at 28.6%, indicating that inter-caste marriage is not confined to historically disadvantaged groups alone. While this suggests that attitudinal shifts are occurring across the caste spectrum, the relatively modest percentages for each category also

Rate of Inter-Caste Marriage by Caste group
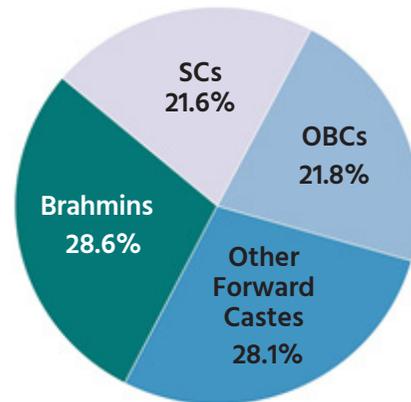
Data source : India Human Development Survey II

highlight the continued dominance of caste endogamy. Social structures particularly family expectations and the desire to maintain caste boundaries remain powerful influences that limit the extent to which individuals can act on more egalitarian beliefs.

Many young individuals, though ideologically supportive of inter-caste unions, hesitate to act on these convictions due to fear of familial backlash, social stigma, and the risk of exclusion. Traditional notions of caste purity, intergenerational honour, and societal approval continue to dominate marital decision-making in both rural and semi urban contexts. The same has been concluded by Chowdhry (2012), the most hallowed cultural concepts like aikas, izzat, biradari and bhaichara are contingent upon maintaining traditional marriage prohibitions.

Notably, urban youth appear more willing to challenge these norms. Educational spaces, especially universities, play a transformative role by breaking the notion of caste and fostering inter-caste interactions. These environments help young people find common ground beyond inherited social identities, thus creating a foundation for more egalitarian relationships.

The role of education in promoting inter caste marriages

While education is often assumed to be a tool for social reform, recent empirical evidence complicates this narrative. In their study, Ray, Chaudhuri, and Sahai (2020) find that 'the education level of the spouses themselves has no significant correlation with the likelihood of an inter-caste marriage. Instead, it is the educational attainment of the husband's mother that demonstrates a statistically significant positive effect. Specifically, a one standard deviation

increase in her education is associated with a 10% higher probability of an inter-caste union'. This finding highlights the gendered intergenerational transmission of social values, suggesting that mothers with higher education levels may raise sons with more liberal or caste neutral perspectives. The maternal figure thus emerges as a pivotal yet often overlooked agent in challenging entrenched caste norms and enabling inter-caste marriages.

Challenges to inter-caste marriages

While inter-caste marriage holds the potential to challenge rigid social hierarchies and foster equality, it is far from an easy path. In India, such unions often become sites of deep controversy and resistance. Despite couples sharing similar levels of education, economic background, and mutual life goals, the question of caste continues to loom large. The idea of caste purity remains entrenched in the mentality, making such marriages a rare exception rather than a social norm.

Urban vs Rural Inter caste Marriage Rates:

In rural areas, the consequences are often harsher. Families who support or engage in inter-caste marriages are frequently subjected to social ostracism, boycotts, and in some cases, outright violence. These forms of punishment not only isolate individuals but

Rate of Inter-Caste Marriages by Type of residence
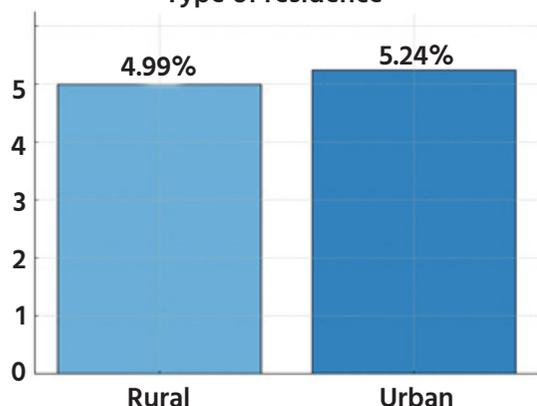
Data source : India Human Development Survey II

deepen the stigma associated with defying caste boundaries. Women from dominant or upper-caste backgrounds marrying into lower-caste households face even greater scrutiny and social dishonour. In extreme cases, this has led to honour killings, particularly in regions where Khap Panchayats and caste councils hold informal yet influential power. These traditional institutions often function as enforcers of caste endogamy, curbing the autonomy of individuals in choosing life partners.

Urban areas are often assumed to be more progressive, but the reality is more complex. While there may be a marginally greater acceptance of inter-caste unions, many couples still face familial resistance, emotional estrangement, and a lack of social support. The appearance of modernity does not necessarily translate into the erosion of caste prejudice.

Despite these societal challenges, the Indian Constitution guarantees protection to inter-caste couples under several fundamental rights-Article 14 ensures equality before the law and equal protection of laws, irrespective of caste. Article 21, which protects the right to life and personal liberty, includes within it the freedom to choose one's partner, as reaffirmed by the Supreme Court in Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M. (2018).

Schemes for inter-caste couples

Several Indian states have implemented targeted financial assistance schemes to encourage inter-caste marriages as a means of promoting social integration, reducing caste-based discrimination, and upholding the constitutional ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity. These incentives aim not only to provide material support to newly married couples but also to symbolically blur out the social boundaries that have historically reinforced caste endogamy. The Dr. Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration through inter-caste marriages, implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, provides a one-time financial incentive of ₹2.5 lakh to eligible couples. The scheme aims to promote social integration and reduce caste-based discrimination by encouraging marriages between Scheduled Caste individuals and non-SC partners.

Other state implemented schemes

States	Scheme Names	Incentive Amount
Maharashtra	Dr. Ambedkar Samajik Vivah Yojana	₹50,000 – ₹3 lakh
Tamil Nadu	Dr. Ambedkar Award for Socially Integrative Marriage	₹2.5 lakh
Rajasthan	Inter-caste Marriage Scheme	₹5 lakh
Uttar Pradesh	Inter-caste Marriage Incentive Scheme	₹50,000 – ₹2.5 lakh

Odisha	Inter-caste Marriage Incentive Scheme	₹2.5 lakh
Karnataka	Inter-caste Marriage Incentive Scheme	₹2.5 lakh
Bihar, MP, CG	Similar schemes with cash assistance up to ₹2.5 lakh	₹1 – ₹2.5 lakh

Why Marrying Outside Caste Makes Rational Sense

Despite being framed largely as a matter of social justice or constitutional rights, inter-caste marriage also stands on firm scientific and rational foundations. Genetic studies have consistently shown that caste endogamy increases the risk of recessive disorders due to reduced genetic variation. Research from the CSIR, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (Thangaraj et al., 2008) demonstrated that long-standing endogamous practices in South Asia have led to strong founder effects and a rise in diseases such as thalassemia and sickle cell anaemia. Inter-caste marriages, by introducing genetic heterogeneity, act as a buffer against such conditions and promote overall population health. Moreover, psychologists such as Gordon Allport (1954) have shown through the Contact Hypothesis that interpersonal relationships across rigid social divides reduce prejudice and give rise to empathy. When caste endogamy is strictly enforced, it leads to the psychological consequences of ingroup bias and even xenophobia which is a deep-rooted fear or distrust of the "other," which disrupts social cohesion.

Inter-caste unions, by promoting intergroup familiarity and emotional proximity, help dismantle these inherited anxieties. From a moral-philosophical standpoint, Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant said that rational autonomy and the right to self-determination are fundamental to human dignity; thus, choosing one's life partner without caste restrictions is a rational and ethical act. Economically, inter-caste couples often prioritize things like merit, education, and shared values rather than status. These marriages also challenge the cycle of inherited social privilege. As the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu pointed out, when we break rigid traditions like caste endogamy, we interrupt the way in which power and advantage are quietly passed down through families. Inter-caste marriage, then, opens the door to a more equal and fair society. In sum, inter-caste marriage is not merely a symbolic rejection of caste, it is a scientifically sound, psychologically beneficial, and morally necessary path toward a more equal and integrated society.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, keeping in mind the national unity of India, he opined that it is only when Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength to defend itself. Without such internal strength, swaraj for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery.

Conclusion

As showcased in the various trends, the rate of increase of inter-caste marriages is slow, but on the rise, these past few decades. This highlights the evolving nature of Indian society towards greater equality and inclusivity. This shift is not merely a statistical change but a proof of the adaptability and moral depth of Indian civilization. The common presumption that the prevalence of such marriages are higher in the urban areas as compared to the rural areas has been thus proven untrue. Rural areas show more openness to inter-caste marriages, which shows their elasticity towards modern, rational thoughts.

Moving forward, a multifaceted approach is essential with awareness campaigns, providing more financial incentives for intercaste couples, institutional protection, legal aid, and access to safe housing. In terms of educational institutions, particularly in rural and semi urban areas, should play a more proactive role in embedding constitutional values of equality and liberty within the social curriculum. Finally, the state must reframe inter caste marriage not as a constitutional right but as welfare subject and transformative tool. As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar warned us, the people of India, "It is only when Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, swaraj for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery." Inter-caste marriage is one of the clearest steps towards that future where love and individual choices will break barriers and unity becomes our greatest defence. Each such union is a quiet act of nation-building, suggesting to us that India's strength will always lie in the oneness of its people.

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Inter-Caste Marriage : A Path to social cohesion

Vijendra

The question of inter-caste marriage has been a subject of debate in Indian society for decades. Deep-rooted prejudices, traditional barriers, and concerns over cultural identity have often surrounded it. Many social reformers and organizations see it as a necessary step towards national integration and social harmony. Inter-caste is not merely a matter of merely a personal choice between two individuals, but is a broader social phenomenon linked to the vision of a casteless Hindu society.

The real foundation of any marriage—whether inter-caste or within the same caste—should be mutual respect, harmony, shared values, and cultural rootedness. However, in the case of inter-caste marriages, these elements become even more essential because of the social realities and the prejudices that still persist in many communities. The caste, as it functions today, is an outdated and harmful social structure that has historically weakened Indian society. It has been a source of division, suspicion, and discrimination—elements that have crippled our social unity and made the nation vulnerable to external and internal threats.

The original objective from which today's caste system is a corrupted was never meant to be a rigid birth-based hierarchy. Instead, it was originally a functional and dynamic system that classified people based on their inclination, profession, and contribution to society. Over centuries, however, this flexible framework degenerated into a rigid, birth-based order, bringing untouchability, inequality, and discrimination. Saints and reformers across history—from Sant Ravidas to Swami Vivekananda—have opposed such discrimination and worked for a society free from caste-based injustice.

Inter-caste marriage is not merely a private arrangement between two people. It is a social act with the potential to dissolve caste barriers and contribute to national unity. When two individuals from different caste backgrounds come together, it symbolically breaks the mental walls that have kept communities apart for generations. Historical records provide many examples of marriages that crossed social boundaries, long before the term "inter-caste marriage" came into use. Whether among ruling dynasties or common people, such unions were often intended to bridge divisions and create larger social harmony. The spirit behind these historical marriages—overcoming division for the sake of unity—remains relevant even today. We ought to encourage inter-caste marriage as an organic social reform with stress on caution and maturity. Social change must emerge from within society, for which a great amount of education and awakening is needed. Social change cannot be brought through legal compulsion or political symbolism. Forced or ideologically motivated promotion of inter-caste marriages—especially when they appear to be token gestures for publicity—can provoke unnecessary confrontation rather than foster harmony.

True social transformation is always slow, steady, and deeply rooted. It requires patience, determination, and continuous social work. The reform should happen as part of a natural evolution of society, driven by mutual respect and understanding, rather than as a confrontation between tradition and modernity. India's greatest strength lies in its unity amidst diversity. Diversity of customs, languages, and traditions is natural and enriching. However, diversity should not mean division—especially on artificial lines like caste.

Inter-caste marriages, when based on shared cultural values and a spirit of unity, can contribute to the building of a casteless, integrated, and harmonious Hindu society. But unity should not mean the erasure of all diversity—rather, it means respect for different cultural expressions within a shared civilizational identity. It is true that inter-caste marriages sometimes bring new social situations or challenges, from familial acceptance to cultural adjustment. But these challenges should be addressed with maturity, empathy, and a long-term perspective. Social integration is not just about breaking barriers but also about building new bonds—bonds that are respectful of both the individual and the larger community. The purpose of inter-caste marriage should be constructive—helping to heal historical divides—not to provoke social confrontation. It should aim to create bridges of understanding,

Fake Caste Certificates by Converts: Maharashtra's Laudable Decision

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis's announcement underscores the state's commitment to safeguarding the integrity of the reservation system. The misuse of SC certificates by converts, though not widespread, poses a challenge to the system's efficacy and fairness. By cancelling fraudulent certificates and penalizing misuse, the government aims to protect the rights of genuine beneficiaries.

Vijendra

On 17th July, 2025, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis addressed the state legislative council, declaring that Scheduled Caste (SC) certificates obtained fraudulently by individuals from religions other than Hindu, Buddha, or Sikh would be cancelled. He emphasized that those who have availed reservation benefits, such as government jobs or electoral victories, through such fraudulent means would face strict action, including the nullification of their elections. Additionally, Fadnavis highlighted the state government's intent to introduce robust provisions to tackle religious conversions achieved through coercion or deceit. This statement has reignited discussions on the misuse of reservation benefits by converts and the broader historical context of India's reservation system.

Misuse of Reservation by Converts

The reservation system in India, designed to uplift historically disadvantaged communities, has faced challenges due to fraudulent claims, including those by individuals, who convert to religions outside the eligibility criteria for SC benefits. The Scheduled Castes, as defined by the Indian Constitution, primarily include communities historically subjected to caste-based discrimination within the Hindu social order, later extended to include certain Sikh and Buddhist communities.

However, individuals from other religious groups, such as Christianity or Islam, which do not traditionally recognize the caste system, have occasionally obtained SC certificates through misrepresentation or fraudulent means. Such misuse undermines the purpose of reservations, which is to address systemic inequalities faced by specific communities. For instance, a person converting to a religion outside the eligible framework might falsely claim SC status to secure government jobs, educational quotas, or electoral benefits reserved for SC candidates. This not only deprives rightful beneficiaries but also erodes public trust in the reservation system. Fadnavis's statement reflects a response to such concerns, signalling a crackdown on fraudulent practices to ensure that benefits reach the intended communities.

Cases of misuse often involve individuals exploiting loopholes in the verification process. For example, inadequate scrutiny of religious or caste status during certificate issuance can allow ineligible individuals to benefit. In some instances, conversions to Christianity or Islam are alleged to be superficial, with individuals retaining caste identities solely

to claim SC benefits. Such practices have sparked debates about the need for stricter verification mechanisms and clearer guidelines on eligibility, particularly in cases of religious conversion. The Maharashtra government's stance, as articulated by Fadnavis, underscores the importance of maintaining the integrity of the reservation system. By cancelling fraudulently obtained SC certificates and imposing penalties, such as job termination or election nullification, the state aims to deter misuse. Furthermore, the proposed provisions against coercive or deceitful conversions suggest a broader effort to address related issues, as conversions are sometimes linked to attempts to manipulate reservation eligibility.

Historical Context of Reservation in India

The reservation system in India has its roots in the country's complex social and historical landscape, shaped by centuries of caste-based discrimination. The system was formalized to address the systemic exclusion of certain communities, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and later Other Backward Classes (OBCs), from opportunities in education, employment, and political representation.

Pre-Independence Roots

The concept of affirmative action in India predates independence, emerging during the colonial period as social reform movements sought to uplift marginalized groups. In the early 20th century, princely states like Mysore and Kolhapur introduced measures to provide educational and job opportunities to lower-caste communities. The British colonial government also recognized the need for representation, introducing limited reservations for depressed classes in legislative bodies under the Government of India Act, 1935.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a towering figure in the fight against caste oppression, played a pivotal role in advocating for reservations. As a member of the Scheduled Castes himself, Ambedkar argued that systemic discrimination required structural interventions to ensure equality. His efforts culminated in the Poona Pact of 1932, which replaced separate electorates for depressed classes with reserved seats within a joint electorate, laying the groundwork for post-independence reservation policies.

Constitutional Framework

Upon India's independence in 1947, the Constitution, drafted under Dr. Ambedkar's leadership as chairman of the Drafting Committee, enshrined reservations as a tool for social justice. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, while Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in public employment, with provisions for reservations for backward classes. Articles 341 and 342 empower the President to specify Scheduled Castes and Tribes, respectively, eligible for reservation benefits.

Initially, SC status was limited to Hindu communities identified as "untouchables" due to their historical subjugation within the caste hierarchy. In 1956, the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order was amended to include Sikh communities, recognizing similar caste-based disadvantages among them. In 1990, the order was further extended to include Buddhists, primarily those from SC backgrounds who converted to Buddhism following Dr. Ambedkar's lead in 1956. However, communities from other religions, such as Christianity and Islam, were excluded, as these religions do not formally recognize caste distinctions, though caste-like social structures persist informally in some communities.

Evolution and Expansion

Over the decades, the reservation system expanded to address the needs of other marginalized groups. The Mandal Commission report of 1980 recommended reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs), leading to their implementation in 1990, which sparked widespread debates and protests. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) introduced reservations for SCs, STs, and women in local governance, further broadening the system's scope.

The reservation system has achieved significant successes, enabling greater representation of marginalized communities in education, employment, and politics. For instance, SC and ST candidates have benefited from reserved seats in legislatures, access to higher education through quotas, and employment opportunities in government services. However, challenges such as misuse, inadequate implementation, and resistance from privileged groups have persisted.

Socio-Political Implications

Fadnavis's announcement highlights the ongoing tension between preserving the integrity of the reservation system and addressing allegations of misuse. The issue of fraudulent SC certificates is not merely administrative but deeply political, as it intersects with questions of identity, religion, and social justice. The exclusion of Christians and Muslims from SC benefits, despite some communities facing caste- like discrimination, remains a contentious issue. Critics argue that this exclusion ignores the

lived realities of caste persistence across religious lines, while supporters maintain that the reservation system must adhere to its original framework to avoid dilution.

The Maharashtra government's focus on coercive conversions also raises complex questions about religious freedom and social mobility. Conversions, particularly among SC communities, have historically been a form of resistance against caste oppression, as exemplified by Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism. However, allegations of conversions driven by deceit or inducement, sometimes linked to reservation benefits, complicate the discourse. The proposed provisions aim to balance the protection of religious freedom with the prevention of exploitative practices, but their implementation will require careful consideration to avoid overreach or discrimination.

The crackdown on fraudulent SC certificates could strengthen public confidence in the reservation system by ensuring benefits reach the intended recipients. However, it also risks fuelling divisive narratives around religion and caste, particularly in a politically charged environment. The government must navigate these challenges transparently, ensuring that verification processes are fair and do not disproportionately target genuine converts or marginalized groups.

Addressing Misuse: Challenges and Solutions

Combating the misuse of SC certificates requires a multi-pronged approach. First, strengthening the verification process is critical. This could involve cross-referencing religious and caste records, leverage digital databases, and conduct regular audits of certificate issuance. Second, public awareness campaigns can educate communities about eligibility criteria and the consequences of fraud. Third, legal frameworks must be robust yet fair, ensuring that penalties for misuse do not inadvertently harm genuine beneficiaries.

The issue of conversions linked to reservation benefits also demands nuanced policy-making. While coercion and deceit must be addressed, blanket restrictions on conversions could infringe on individual rights. A balanced approach might involve case-by-case evaluations, focusing on evidence of fraudulent intent rather than religious identity alone.

Conclusion

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis's announcement underscores the state's commitment to safeguarding the integrity of the reservation system. The misuse of SC certificates by converts, though not widespread, poses a challenge to the system's efficacy and fairness. By cancelling fraudulent certificates and penalizing misuse, the government aims to protect the rights of genuine beneficiaries. However, this issue cannot be viewed in isolation from the historical context of reservations, which emerged as a response to centuries of caste-based oppression. The reservation system remains a vital tool for social justice, but its success depends on robust implementation, transparent verification, and sensitivity to India's diverse social fabric. As the Maharashtra government moves forward with its proposed measures, it must balance enforcement with fairness to uphold the principles of equality and justice that underpin the reservation system.

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A Path to social cohesion

not deepen divides in the name of progress.

When grounded in mutual respect, cultural rootedness, and the spirit of national integration, inter-caste marriage becomes a quiet social revolution. It strengthens the foundations of equality, fraternity, and unity. Such unions send a powerful message that the worth of an individual lies not in their birth, but in their character, values, and contribution to society. Inter-caste marriages are fully acceptable—indeed welcome—so long as they emerge naturally and serve the higher goal of creating a casteless Hindu society.

Our responsibility lies in creating such social atmosphere for healthy and strong society. Inter-caste marriage is a positive step toward dismantling an outdated and harmful caste system. However, its success depends on the spirit in which it is undertaken. When it is grounded in shared values, mutual respect, and a commitment to social harmony, it can help fulfil the vision of a united, casteless India. This is about a society where birth-based divisions are replaced by cultural solidarity, and where marriage becomes a means to strengthen, rather than divide, the social fabric.

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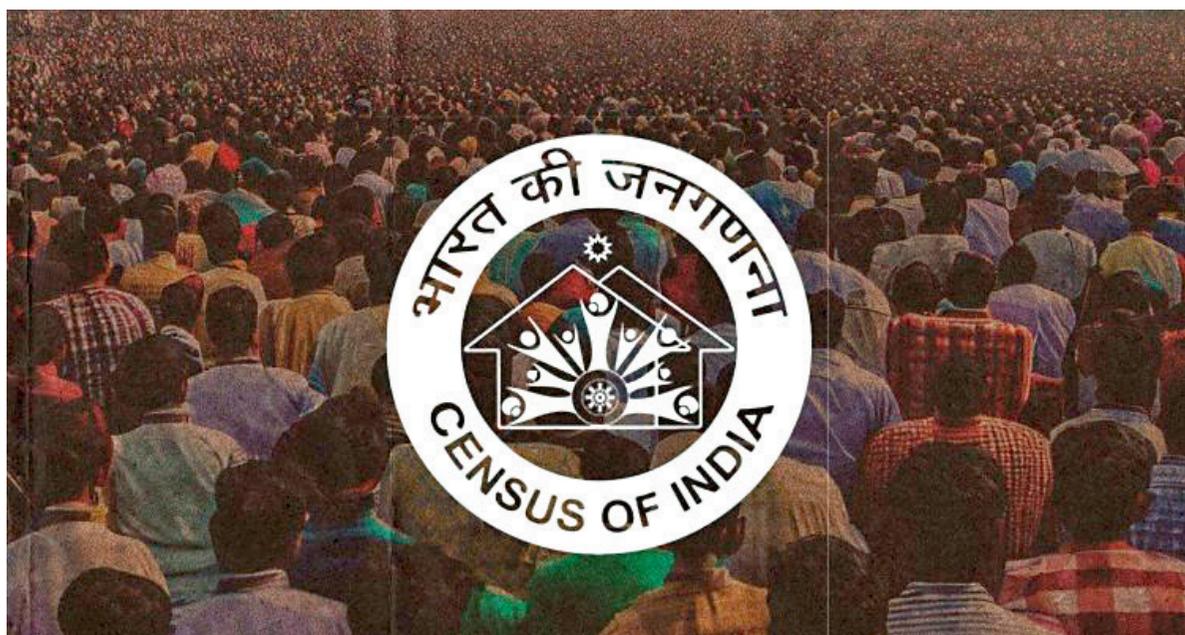
Caste Census: Is it for Social Justice or Political Benefit?

In recent months the issue of caste census has taken a centre stage in India's socio-political discourse, the caste census. At first glance, it may appear to be an exercise in data collection, yet its social, economic and political ramifications are so far-reaching that they could reshape the very foundations of the nation's social structure. Since Independence, India has conducted a decennial census, but apart from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), no official caste-wise population data is recorded. Other communities — especially the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) — remain statistically invisible. Over the past few years, call for a comprehensive caste census has grown louder, particularly from OBC groups. The 2023 Bihar caste survey and its revelations have lent fresh momentum to these demands.

Bhimrao S.

The Union government, led by BJP, has decided to integrate caste census into the forthcoming national census. But behind this apparent shift, is likely to be political pressures and complex motives. The question that hangs over the Indian polity is: Will the caste census chart a new course for social justice, or will it become another instrument in the arsenal of electoral politics?

Why the Caste Census Matters

From the social justice view, a caste census is a revolutionary idea. In a country where caste remains at the core of social and economic inequality, accurate information about the population and socio-economic condition of each caste is vital. At present, there is no credible, up-to-date estimate of

the OBC population. The Mandal Commission, in 1980, relied on the 1931 census — a dataset that is now wholly outdated. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar repeatedly underscored the importance of robust data and a scientific approach in advancing social justice. For him, caste enumeration was not a mere numbers game; it was an instrument to integrate marginalized communities into the mainstream. For SCs and STs, the advantages of such enumeration are obvious.

Accurate data would enable the government to identify which castes most urgently require access to education, healthcare, employment or financial support. Targeted policies could then be crafted, preventing waste of resources and ensuring benefits reach those who need them most. Take, for instance, sub-castes within SCs or the extremely backward communities among OBCs — groups often left out of the current reservation benefits. The Supreme Court's August 1, 2024 ruling in State of Punjab & Others vs. Davinder Singh & Others recognized the principle of sub-classification within SCs, raising hopes for fairer representation based on population and social conditions. A caste census could lay bare the numbers and needs of these sub-groups, enabling more equitable policy-making.

Recalibrating Reservation

Another key advantage of caste enumeration is the potential to rationally reassess India's reservation policies. At present, reservations are capped at 50% by the Supreme Court's 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment. But if the census reveals that the OBC population is far larger than currently assumed, the pressure to raise this cap will grow. This could lead to a fairer distribution of resources and opportunities, especially for underrepresented communities in education and public employment. Beyond quotas, caste-wise socio-economic indicators — literacy levels, poverty rates, access to healthcare — would reveal patterns of deprivation. If a particular community shows high infant mortality or low educational attainment, targeted interventions could be devised. In this way, the caste census could become a practical tool for reducing inequality and integrating the marginalized into the national mainstream. Yet beyond these positive possibilities, the political dimension of the caste census is equally significant. The BJP-led Union government has shifted its position on this issue more than once. In the past, it had opposed a caste census, fearing it might undermine the party's core agenda of Hindu unity. But the political landscape changed dramatically after Bihar's 2023 caste survey and the pressures that followed. The Bihar survey revealed that OBCs and Extremely Backward Castes together constitute over 63% of the state's population — a finding that prompted the state to raise its reservation limit from 50% to 65%. This data reinvigorated the opposition's push for a nationwide caste census, with parties like the Congress, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, and the Samajwadi Party rallying behind the slogan "Jitni Aabadi, Utna Haq" — "As much population, so much right." Congress leader Rahul Gandhi hailed the Bihar survey as a "revolutionary step," while Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar endorsed it as a vital instrument of social justice. Under such mounting pressure, the BJP has been forced to re-examine its position.

BJP's Political Imperative

For the BJP, the caste census has now become a political inevitability. Elections in India are rarely won on development alone; caste equations, regional identities, and social polarization often play decisive roles. OBCs constitute the largest and most diverse voting bloc in the country, particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra, where they can swing electoral outcomes. In recent years, the BJP has expanded its electoral base by focusing on non-Yadav OBCs and extremely backward communities. Initiatives like granting constitutional status to the OBC Commission in 2017 and increasing OBC representation in the Union Cabinet signal this strategic outreach. The caste census would give the BJP precise data on the size and socio-economic status of these groups, enabling them to design targeted welfare schemes. This would allow the party to present itself as the champion of OBC interests. But here, the motive is not purely social justice — it is also about aligning the census with the party's broader Hindutva agenda. The BJP's ideological foundation rests on the notions of Hindu unity and "One Nation." Yet, caste realities remain an inescapable truth of Indian society. Recognizing caste through the census, while framing it under the banner of "development" and "equal opportunity for all," offers the BJP a way to strengthen OBC support without diluting its core narrative. In doing so, it could project its slogan "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" as a tangible reality.

Opposition's Rallying Cry

The opposition, meanwhile, is equally determined to make the caste census a political weapon. The Congress has demanded it since 2019, while the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal have woven it into the fabric of their political strategies. Their case is simple: if OBC numbers are shown to be higher than assumed, reservation quotas could be expanded in line with Mandal Commission principles. The slogan "Jitni Aabadi, Utna Haq" — "As much population, so much right" — goes beyond reservations to demand proportional

allocation of education, jobs, economic programmes, and political representation.

This message directly challenges entrenched socio-economic inequalities and resonates with voters. Should the census confirm large OBC numbers, the 50% reservation cap will come under intense scrutiny, creating legal and political turbulence. With the 2029 general elections looming, no party can afford to alienate OBC voters. If the BJP resists the demand, the opposition will brand it "anti-backward" and seek to win over the electorate.

> The caste census could become a practical tool for reducing inequality and integrating the marginalized into the national mainstream. Yet beyond these positive possibilities, the political dimension of the caste census is equally significant.

Who Really Benefits?

The ultimate question remains: who will benefit most from a caste census — the people or the politicians? For political parties, such data would be political gold. It is not just numbers; it is a roadmap of each constituency's social, economic, and political dynamics. Knowing the exact population of each caste, their influence, their needs, and the prevailing equations would enable hyper-targeted campaign planning. At the booth level, outreach strategies could be tailored to voter psychology. Resources — whether manpower, advertising budgets, or rally schedules — could be deployed with maximum impact. Candidate selection could be fine-tuned to maintain caste balance, making it easier to secure votes. Campaign narratives could be customized to tap into the aspirations and grievances of specific communities, delivered via local leaders and amplified on social media. Critics warn that such a census could deepen caste polarization, with parties consolidating votes by portraying themselves as the true representatives of particular communities or by stoking resentment against others. This could lead to a political climate of "us versus them," making governance a secondary priority.

A Tool for Transformation — or Division?

For political parties, a caste census could make winning elections and building coalition governments considerably easier. Once in power, they could strengthen their vote banks by prioritizing the interests of specific communities in administrative appointments, postings to state corporations, and the formulation of policies. In short, the caste census has the potential to be a game changer for political actors, offering them precise data to craft electoral strategies and manipulate the arithmetic of votes. Yet for the common people, its benefits will materialize only if the government uses the data honestly and with the intent of empowering the marginalized. If these figures are exploited merely for vote-bank politics or the deepening of social divides, the objective of social justice will remain unfulfilled.

A genuine public benefit demands a clear and farsighted policy. For instance, if a particular community is found to have a low level of education, targeted measures such as special schools, scholarships, or skill development programmes could be introduced. If a region is underserved in healthcare, hospitals or mobile clinics could be established. Infrastructure development, housing allotments, income generation schemes, and agricultural initiatives could all be prioritized for communities most in need. In this way, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and OBC groups could truly be brought into the national mainstream.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar consistently emphasized the importance of social harmony and fraternity. In his vision, the caste census was not merely a compilation of figures but an instrument for social transformation. Yet the possibility of misuse cannot be ignored. Should political parties employ this data solely to polarize the electorate, the fabric of social harmony could be torn. Some communities might be emboldened to demand greater rights on the basis of their numbers, while others could sink into a sense of insecurity, heightening social tensions.

It is therefore essential that the government handles this information with transparency and responsibility. Ultimately, the caste census stands as both an opportunity for social justice and a potential pawn in the political chessboard. It can serve as a tool to integrate the marginalized into the mainstream, but it can equally become a catalyst for caste-based polarization. For it to truly benefit the public, the state must act with sincerity and openness, while the people themselves must remain vigilant in holding it accountable. In the words of Dr. Ambedkar, "Caste is a reality, but to annihilate it, we must confront it." The caste census is one step in that confrontation — whether it will advance social transformation or serve political expediency is a question only time will answer.

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Dr. Ambedkar: The Law Minister, Who Refused to Compromise

When Dr. B. R. Dr. Ambedkar was appointed as India's first Law Minister in 1947, it wasn't just another Cabinet post being filled. It was a moment that challenged deeply rooted caste hierarchies in Indian politics. Coming from the historically oppressed Mahar community, and after years of fighting caste injustice, Dr. Ambedkar's entry into Nehru's cabinet sent a powerful message. It was a statement that the new republic was committed—at least in spirit—to building an inclusive society. While that promise remained only partly realised, Dr. Ambedkar's presence gave India's young democracy both intellectual weight and moral strength.

Adv. Arhat

Before independence, Dr. Ambedkar served as the Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council, where he initiated significant reforms: the eight-hour workday, maternity benefits for women, and stronger legal protections for workers. These weren't just policy changes—they reflected a deeper belief that law could be used to reshape society for the better. It's that same belief he carried into his role as Law Minister.

Despite his sharp legal mind and public stature, Dr. Ambedkar was not included

in the Constituent Assembly at first. The Congress Party didn't nominate him. It was only because of Jogendra Nath Mandal and the Scheduled Castes Federation in Bengal that he eventually got a seat. Dr. Ambedkar didn't hide his discomfort with how the Assembly was formed. It wasn't elected by universal adult suffrage, and most of its members came from dominant caste backgrounds. He was worried—and rightly so—that the Constitution would be shaped by those with little understanding of what the oppressed faced.

Once he became Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Dr. Ambedkar went to work. His vision laid the foundation of the Indian Constitution—liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice were not just words, but goals

> Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, India's first Law Minister, championed equality through the Constitution and the Hindu Code Bill. Facing resistance, rejecting compromise on social justice, leaving a legacy of using law for liberation.

rooted in lived experience. He helped introduce measures like equality before the law, reservations in government jobs, special protections for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the abolition of untouchability. He also spoke out for an independent judiciary, suggesting that judges be appointed after consulting the Chief Justice.

Dr. Ambedkar didn't see law as just rules and procedures. He saw it as a tool for real change. He took on the caste system and patriarchy head-on. His thoughts on women's rights were ahead of his time. "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved," he once said. Whether it was fighting for equal property rights for women or standing up for the rights of workers and the marginalised, his work always pointed toward a more just society.

Perhaps his boldest move as Law Minister was the introduction of the Hindu Code Bill. This bill aimed to reform Hindu personal laws and give women equal rights in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption. It was an attempt to bring democracy into the private sphere of family life—where tradition often went unquestioned. But it faced fierce resistance from upper-caste conservatives, and the Congress Party didn't stand firmly behind it.

Disappointed, Dr. Ambedkar resigned in 1951. In his resignation speech, he said "To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex, which is the soul of Hindu society untouched... is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap."

Although Dr. Ambedkar and Nehru both talked about building a modern India, their ways of getting there were very different. Nehru preferred compromise, careful not to upset the more conservative sections of the Congress. Dr. Ambedkar believed that democracy without social reform was hollow. As Kancha Ilaiah has pointed out, Congress under Nehru became a party dominated by the "bhadralok"—the English-educated upper-caste elite. Leaders like Dr. Ambedkar were expected to be symbolic figures, not agents of real change. Dr. Ambedkar deliberately distanced himself from political formations led by upper castes believing that any genuine caste revolution had to be led by the productive masses.

Dr. Ambedkar quickly saw through the limits of the so-called reformist agenda of Nehru's government. The fierce opposition to the Hindu Code Bill showed just how unwilling the ruling establishment was to challenge caste or gender hierarchies. Congress preferred to focus on economic development rather than address deep-rooted social inequalities. That was a compromise Dr. Ambedkar simply couldn't live with. His time as Law Minister may have been short, but it left a lasting impact. Dr. Ambedkar showed what it meant to legislate with courage. Today, when symbolic gestures often replace real change, his legal and moral clarity feels all the more urgent. Everyone knows his name, but how many remember the deeper vision he stood for? Even today, most political institutions hesitate to give real power to Dalit-Bahujan leaders. They're often included for show, not substance. The Hindu Code Bill—partially passed years later—is a reminder of the kind of bold reforms Dr. Ambedkar stood for.

For Dr. Ambedkar, being Law Minister wasn't about holding office. It was about principle. His resignation wasn't just about a failed bill; it was a stand against a system that refused to deliver justice. In today's India, where politics often means compromise and silence, Dr. Ambedkar's life reminds us that law should serve as a tool of liberation. If we truly want to honour him, we must carry forward the work he started—using the Constitution not to protect privilege, but to fight for equality.

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Woman warrior who turn table

Kalpana Saroj believes that it is not about ownership but stewardship, a responsibility to use what she has been given for the greater good. In her home, there is no hierarchy at the dining table; she shares her meals with her household staff, maintaining the same simplicity that shaped her earliest years. Success, for her, has never been a reason to rise above others, but a chance to sit beside them with humility.

In the Akola district of Maharashtra, the winters are crisp, the summers unforgiving, and the horizon seems endless. It was here, in the tiny village Murtijapur, that a young girl named Kalpana Varule learned early that life could be both beautiful and brutal. Her father, Mahadev Varule, served as a police constable; her mother, Parvati, held the home together with quiet strength. Kalpana was a bright student of the sort who could make her teachers smile with her quick answers. But she was also a girl in a marginalised community, in a village bound by the old rules. Those rules dictated that a girl's destiny was marriage, not education. And so, when Kalpana was still in the seventh grade, she was married to a man she had never met. "It wasn't a choice," she recalls. "It was a ritual."

A City of Broken Promises

Mumbai, the city of dreams, welcomed her not with opportunity, but with a cramped slum dwelling and the harsh reality of abuse. Her in-laws were violent, her living conditions unspeakable. For six months, she endured in silence until her father visited. He found his daughter bruised, underfed, and emotionally broken. Without hesitation, he brought her back to Murtijapur, hoping to restore her safety.

But home was no refuge. The village became another prison. She was labelled a failure, a burden. The whispers and stares were constant. She was neither allowed to return to school nor treated with compassion. In that suffocating environment, Kalpana saw no way forward.

One afternoon, despair swallowed her whole. In her aunt's house, she drank three bottles of a poisonous chemical used to kill bedbugs. The world went black. The doctor who saved her life also delivered the news to her relatives and instead of sympathy, she was met with anger and shame. That moment changed her. "When I opened my eyes, I realised if I had died, my story would have ended as just another tragedy. I didn't want that. I decided I would live, and I would live with purpose."

Starting Over

Kalpana left for Mumbai once more, this time determined never to return to the village for good. She stayed with a family friend in a railway quarter and found a small hosiery factory. Her sewing skills earned her first wages. "It wasn't much," she said, "but it was mine." After two and a half years, another storm hit: her father lost his job. Without hesitation, Kalpana brought her entire family to Mumbai. They moved into a single-room chawl in Kalyan, the air heavy with the smell of coal stoves and the chatter of neighbours.

It was here that tragedy struck again. Her younger sister developed a serious abdominal illness. The operation required ₹2,000 a sum that might as well have been two lakhs for Kalpana at the time. She begged, borrowed, and searched for help, but none came. Her sister died, looking at her with trust until her last breath. "I can never forget that look," Kalpana said quietly. "It said: I know you'll save me. And I couldn't. That day I promised I would earn enough that no one I love would suffer because of money."

First Step into Business

Determined to change her circumstances, she learned of the Mahatma Phule Scheme, offering loans to entrepreneurs from disadvantaged communities. She applied, was granted ₹50,000, and started a furniture business. Her small enterprise gave her a taste of independence. She began helping others from her community navigate the same process, training them on how to start businesses. "Helping others grow was not just charity," she explained. "It created a network of people who could stand on their own feet."

Soon, opportunity knocked in the form of a land deal. A small plot in Kalyan was selling for ₹2.5 lakh cheap because it was tied up in legal issues under the Ceiling Act and had a tenant with hereditary rights ("kul"). Kalpana studied property law, something completely foreign to her, and worked tirelessly for two years to clear all encumbrances. When the title was finally clean, the land's value had soared to ₹50 lakh. Partnering with a Sindhi builder, she began constructing a building. But success drew dangerous attention. Local gangsters, threatened by a young woman from a marginalised background entering the male-dominated construction trade, plotted to kill her. A police tip-off saved her life. The authorities not only intervened but issued her a revolver licence within 24 hours, an extraordinary show of faith in her integrity and determination. "Fear is natural," she said. "But letting fear stop you is a choice. I chose to keep going." She went on to complete not one, but three more buildings.

Kamani Tubes Turning Point

Then came the call that would change everything. Kamani Tubes Ltd., once a thriving manufacturer, lay in ruins. It carried ₹116 crore in debt and faced 140 legal cases. Its workers, desperate to save their jobs, pleaded with Kalpana to take over as Chairperson. She could have walked away. But something in the challenge called to her. "I wasn't a graduate. I had never studied finance or engineering. But I knew how to fight for what I believed in."

She met the finance minister, negotiated with banks to reduce interest and penalties, and promised repayment within a year. She removed semi-government tenants from the company's two office towers, shifted the factory to Wada after the Kurla plant was stripped of its machinery, and painstakingly revived operations.

For six years, she fought in the Supreme Court, emerging as the sole owner. The victory came with a daunting condition: restart production within three years. She delivered. The first year back in operation brought a ₹5 crore profit. From there, the company climbed steadily to its present valuation of over ₹3,000 crore.

Her Leadership Philosophy

For all her extraordinary achievements, Kalpana's philosophy is rooted in grounded simplicity. She rejects the idea that feminism is about special treatment. "Every girl should understand that nobody is entitled to privileges just because she is a girl or a boy," she said. "We are all equal. We must compete as equals." Work-life balance, in her eyes, is non-negotiable. "At the end of the day, we don't go to a hotel — we go home. Home is always more important. Seek help when needed, but never neglect it." She cites Rani Lakshmibai as a reminder that duty and care can coexist: "When there was a need, she carried her son on her back and went into battle."

On the modern obsession with quick success and easy money, her advice is clear: "If there is a pure purpose, then success matters. Otherwise, money is just a pile of paper. Money is important, but so is the purpose with which

KALPANA SAROJ

Inspiring journey from being child bride to becoming a self made millionaire!

it is earned. Social responsibility comes first."

Beyond Business

While her story is often told as one of entrepreneurial success, Kalpana's impact runs deeper. She has mentored countless entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds, championed educational initiatives for girls, and advocated for mental health support for those facing social stigma. Her contributions have earned her India's highest civilian recognitions, including the Padmashree and the Nari Shakti Puraskar, among numerous other awards. But for Kalpana, awards are milestones, not destinations.

Connected to Roots

When asked how she remains so deeply grounded despite building an empire and receiving national honours, Kalpana's answer was disarmingly simple. "Nothing I do is truly mine," she said with quiet conviction. "Every opportunity came to me through God's grace, and I am only grateful that I have been able to withstand each storm He placed in my path." Her life, she believes, is not about ownership but stewardship, a responsibility to use what she has been given for the greater good. In her home, there is no hierarchy at the dining table; she shares her meals with her household staff, maintaining the same simplicity that shaped her earliest years. Success, for her, has never been a reason to rise above others, but a chance to sit beside them with humility.

Next Frontier

Her latest venture, Kalpana Saroj Global Aviation Pvt. Ltd., focuses on Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) for aircraft in Nagpur. Once again stepping into a male-dominated field. "I don't see industries as male or female. I see problems that need solving." When asked what drives her, she smiles. "I stopped asking if something is possible. I only ask: what's the best way to do it?"

As our conversation drew to a close, it became clear that Kalpana Saroj's strength does not lie only in her business acumen or her ability to turn adversity into triumph; it lies equally in her refusal to let success distance her from her roots. She measures her wealth not in numbers, but in the lives, she can touch, the storms she can help others survive. Her journey from a dusty village in Maharashtra to the commanding heights of Indian industry is extraordinary, but the woman herself remains rooted in the values of gratitude, service, and simplicity. In a world where achievement often builds walls, Kalpana chooses to build longer tables and sit at them with everyone, as an equal.

From a child bride in a dusty village to the helm of a multi-thousand-crore empire, Kalpana Saroj's life defies every limitation society tries to place upon her. It is a reminder that resilience is not born from comfort, it is forged in fire. Her journey tells us this: You can rise from the ashes. But first, you must decide that ashes are not your final chapter.

As told to Chinmayee
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A Wake-Up Call for Social Justice

As India looks ahead to 2047, when the nation will mark a hundred years of Independence, there is much to celebrate. Decades of progress, growth, and democratic governance have transformed the country in countless ways. And yet, an uncomfortable truth continues to cast a shadow over this journey: caste-based discrimination, especially against Dalit communities, has not disappeared. A recent report by Karnataka's internal quota commission reveals a sobering reality — even today, seventy-five percent of Scheduled Caste communities in the state face untouchability in some form. It is a reminder that while India has changed in many ways, centuries-old prejudices still survive in both rural and urban life.

The commission's findings is no longer always obvious or tied to traditional practices alone. In modern cities, it often appears in subtler but equally damaging ways. Dalits who are qualified

SPOTLIGHT

S Tekchand

and capable still find themselves denied jobs in the private sector, not because of their skills or experience but because of bias. Many are turned away when seeking to rent a home, with landlords citing flimsy reasons to mask caste prejudice. In workplaces, Dalit employees may be deliberately isolated from colleagues, excluded from team activities, or made to feel unwelcome through snide remarks about their caste or their eligibility through reservation policies. For others, the bias plays out in public spaces, where entry to certain temples is denied, or age-old practices of separate seating and drinking water arrangements still persist in some areas.

The commission categorised its findings in degrees of discrimination faced by different castes—fifteen castes reported severe social discrimination, twenty-eight fell into the middle level, thirty-eight experienced less discrimination, and only twenty-two reported no such issues at all. The numbers reveal that while open segregation may have reduced, social exclusion remains deeply rooted and widespread.

It is important to understand that India is not alone in having battled such entrenched forms of social exclusion. History shows similar struggles elsewhere. In Japan, for instance, a community known as the Burakumin faced untouchability linked to professions such as leather and meat processing. Through strong political will, targeted social policies, and a sustained commitment to equality, Japan was able to dismantle these barriers to a large extent. This international example offers a vital lesson for India: transformation requires decisive action, not half-hearted reforms.

It is not as though India lacks the legal framework to address such injustice. The abolishment of untouchability is enshrined in the Constitution under Article 17, making its practice a punishable offence. Laws such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act of 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 were designed to safeguard dignity and equal rights. But while these laws exist on paper, the persistence of untouchability makes it clear that legal measures alone are not enough. The gap lies in the social mindset — and that is where the real battle must be fought.

True freedom is not just about being liberated from colonial rule. It means living in a society where no one is judged or limited because of the circumstances of their birth. For such freedom to be real, there has to be genuine equality of opportunity, where education, employment, and housing are accessible to all. It means equal treatment in workplaces and communities, where individuals are valued for their abilities and character rather than their caste or background. And it also means equal respect — a recognition of each person's dignity, regardless of who they are.

This is not a responsibility that can be left only to committees, courts, or governments. Every citizen holds the power to challenge prejudice in everyday life. This could mean speaking up when a colleague is treated unfairly, refusing to engage in discriminatory practices, or simply ensuring that social spaces are inclusive. Such small but powerful acts strengthen the foundation of equality in ways that no legislation can achieve alone.

As another Independence Day comes and goes, perhaps the most meaningful tribute we can pay to our freedom fighters is not just parades or speeches, but a collective pledge: to never allow caste, gender, or birth to dictate someone's place in society. If, by 2047, we can ensure that no Indian is excluded or demeaned for these reasons, we will have achieved a form of independence far greater than what was won in 1947 — the independence of dignity, respect, and equality for all.

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T.N. Panel Seeks Removal of Caste Column in Police Appraisal Forms

The Tamil Nadu Fifth Police Commission has recommended removing the caste/community column from performance appraisal forms of police personnel to curb bias and promote uniformity in the force. The column currently appears in Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) for Head Constables and Special Sub-Inspectors, along with a section seeking details on their work with oppressed classes.

The commission, led by former Madras High Court judge C.T. Selvam, said caste references are unnecessary for evaluating professional performance and could influence marks crucial for promotions, increments, and awards. Senior police officers also called for ending the practice of noting the caste of complainants and accused persons, citing no legal provision for it. The State government has yet to announce its stance on the recommendations.

Larger Bench to Decide if Caste Scrutiny Committees Can Recall Orders Obtained by Fraud

The Bombay High Court has referred to a larger Bench the question of whether caste scrutiny committees under the Maharashtra Caste Certificate Act, 2000, can recall caste validity certificates obtained through fraud, misrepresentation, or suppression of facts.

The Aurangabad Bench, comprising Justices Manish Pitale and Y.G. Khobragade, made the referral while hearing petitions by four Nanded district residents whose Scheduled Tribe validity certificates were cancelled by the Kinwat-based Scrutiny Committee in May 2025 for alleged fraud.

Petitioners argued that the committees lack statutory review powers and become functus officio after issuing certificates, relying on earlier High Court rulings. The State countered that fraud cannot be protected by procedural limitations and cited judgments upholding cancellations in such cases.

Noting conflicting past rulings, the Bench said scrutiny committees, with quasi-judicial powers akin to civil courts, are better equipped than writ courts to assess factual fraud. It warned against excessive recall powers but stressed the need to protect the integrity of the validation process.

The court framed five legal questions for the larger Bench, including whether committees have inherent recall powers, what safeguards should apply, and whether earlier rulings need reconsideration. The matter now awaits allocation to a larger Bench by the Chief Justice.

Gujarat Records 15,303 Caste-Crime Complaints in Five Years

Gujarat has logged 15,303 complaints from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe members through the National Helpline Against Atrocities (14566) over the past five years, marking a steep surge in caste-related grievances. Data presented in the Rajya Sabha shows cases jumped from 191 in 2020 to 705 in 2021, then surged to 3,755 in 2022 and nearly doubled to 7,432 in 2023. Though numbers dipped to 2,144 in 2024 and 1,076 in 2025 (till July 31), the cumulative total highlights a deep-rooted problem.

Of these complaints, 223 FIRs were registered, with 221 cases resolved and two pending. The toll-free helpline, aimed at grievance redressal and awareness on legal safeguards, has received 6.34 lakh calls nationwide as of mid-2021, but Gujarat's spike stands out. Officials say the rise could reflect improved awareness, yet the persistence of atrocities signals that systemic social justice challenges remain unaddressed in the state.

Madhya Pradesh Sees 41 Daily Crimes Against SC/ST Women, Including 7 Rapes

Madhya Pradesh has reported 44,978 crimes against women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes between 2022 and 2024, averaging 41 cases every day, according to data tabled in the state assembly. In response to a query by opposition MLA Arif Masood, the government revealed that 7,418 of these were rape cases, translating to seven Dalit or Adivasi women raped daily.

The figures also include 558 murders, 338 gangrapes, 1,906 domestic violence cases, and 5,983 incidents of molestation, underscoring both public and private sphere violence. SCs and STs make up around 38% of the state's population, yet remain disproportionately affected by gender- and caste-based crimes. The data points to a persistent pattern of vulnerability and systemic failure in safeguarding women from marginalised communities.

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DINVISHESH

15th August
Independence Day
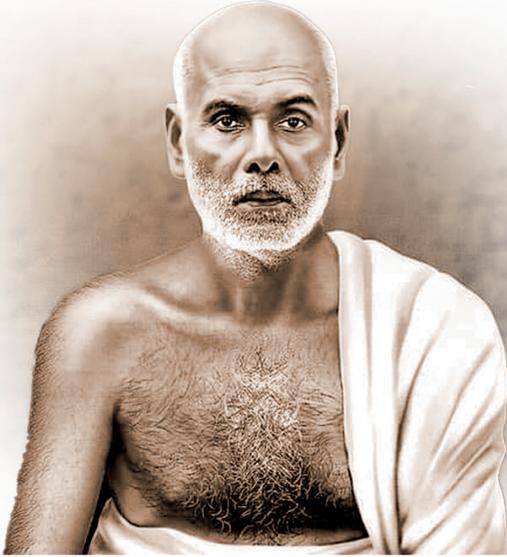
Remembering
Sree Narayana Guru

20th August Sree Narayan Guru Birth Anniversary

Sree Narayana Guru (1856–1928) was a revered spiritual leader, social reformer, and philosopher from Kerala, India. Born into an Ezhava family, a community considered lower in the caste hierarchy, he rose to become a beacon of social change. Guru challenged the oppressive caste system and advocated for equality, unity, and human dignity. His famous teaching, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man," encapsulated his vision of universal brotherhood.

Guru founded the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam in 1903 to uplift marginalized communities through education and social reform. He established temples open to all castes, breaking rigid traditions, and promoted self-reliance and spiritual growth. His philosophy, rooted in Advaita Vedanta, emphasized self-knowledge and compassion.

A poet and scholar, Guru composed works like Atmopadesa Satakam, blending spiritual wisdom with practical guidance. His efforts transformed Kerala's social fabric, fostering equality and education. Today, his legacy endures through institutions and followers who continue his mission of social justice and universal harmony.

16th August
Sant Dyaneshwar
Birth Anniversary

7th September
Raje Umaji Naik
Death Anniversary

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