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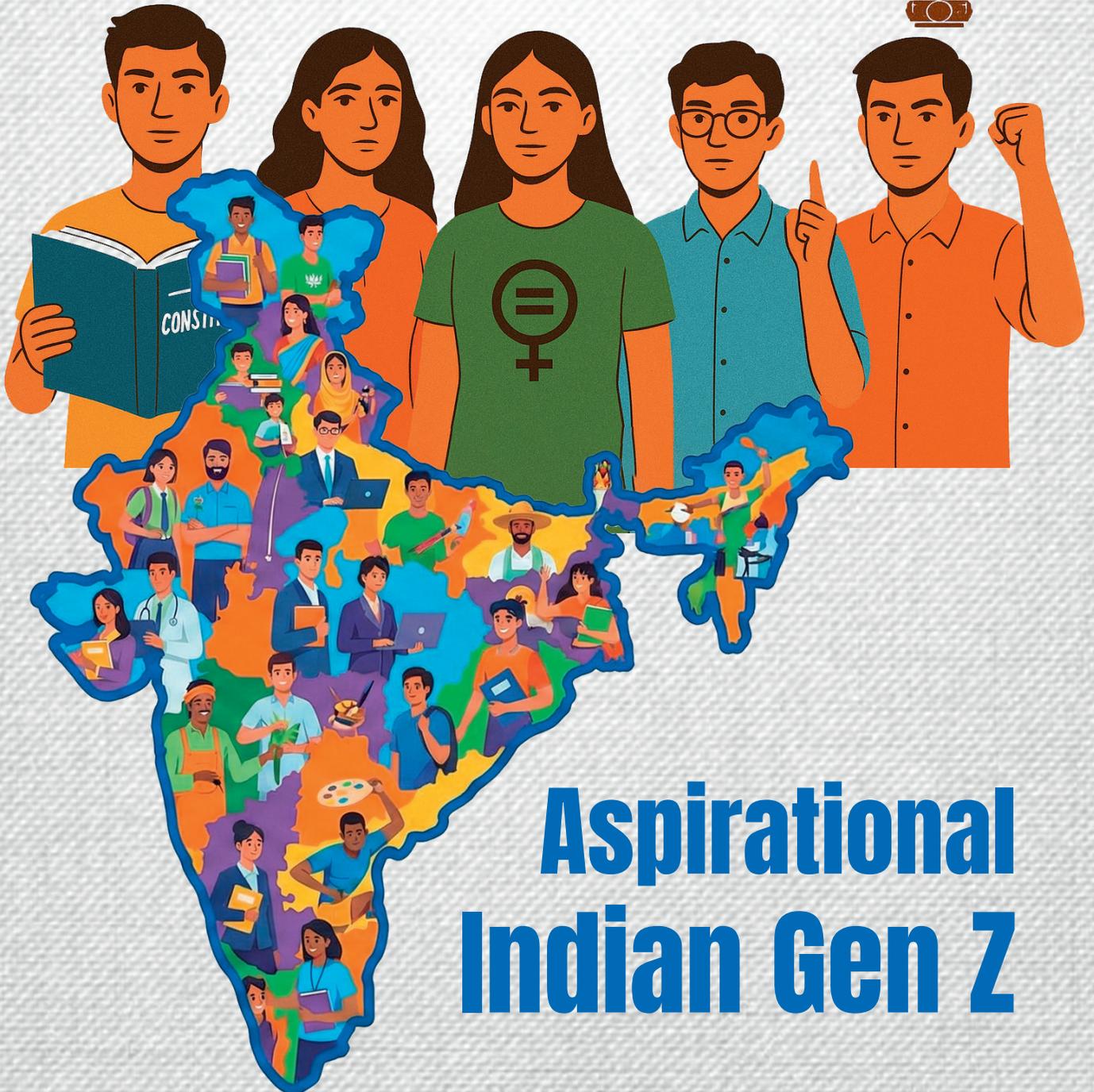
14 DECEMBER 2025 | Year 5 | Vol. 9

## CONSTITUTION



## VALUE SYSTEM

## BALANCE OF POWER

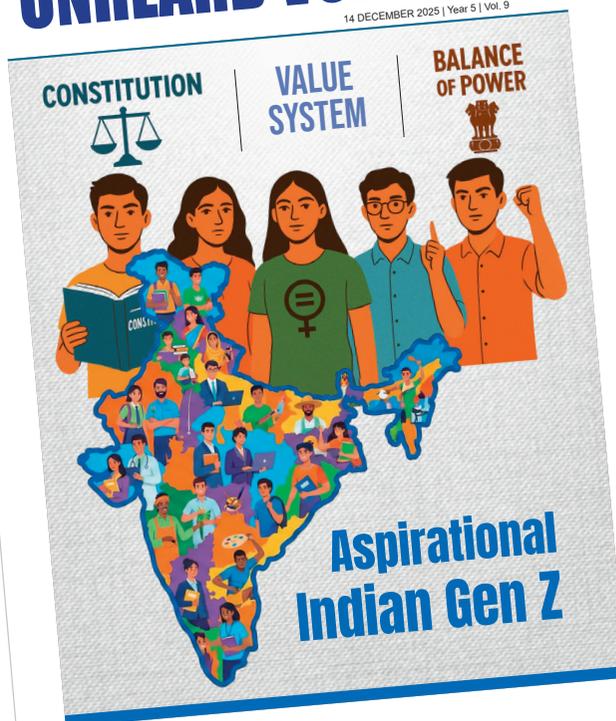


# Aspirational Indian Gen Z

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# Protecting Rights of Genuine SCs

In a pivotal judicial pronouncement that has reignited national debate over religion, caste, and affirmative action, the Allahabad High Court has reaffirmed a principle long embedded in India's constitutional design: Scheduled Caste (SC) reservation is inseparable from the caste structures rooted in specific Indic religions. The Court directed the Uttar Pradesh government to ensure that individuals who convert to Christianity cannot continue to claim SC benefits, describing the practice as a "fraud on the Constitution." Justice Praveen Kumar Giri's bench did not invent a new doctrine; it reiterated what the Constitution itself has recognized since 1950 — that caste-based deprivation, and therefore caste-based reservation, has historical meaning only within Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist social frameworks.

This ruling is a timely and necessary reaffirmation of constitutional clarity. It arrives at a moment when debates around religious conversion, reservation eligibility, and minority rights have become intertwined in ways that risk distorting the foundational purpose of affirmative action.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 explicitly limits SC recognition to Hindus, later extended to Sikhs (1956) and Buddhists (1990). This limitation is not arbitrary; it is based on the reality that caste-based discrimination — the very discrimination reservations are meant to remedy — historically originates from the social structures of these communities. Christianity and Islam, as doctrinal frameworks, do not recognize caste in the same hierarchical form. Therefore, to claim benefits based on caste oppression after leaving the religious and social context in which caste is recognized creates a legal contradiction.

The Court's position aligns with decades of jurisprudence, including Supreme Court observations that conversion undertaken for the sole purpose of accessing reservation constitutes a misuse of constitutional policy. The Allahabad High Court merely enforced what higher courts have already affirmed: reservation is corrective justice, not a transferable entitlement that follows an individual across religious identities.

One of the most significant implications of the ruling is its emphasis on protecting the constitutional rights of SC and ST communities themselves. Expanding the SC category to religious groups that do not historically experience caste-based discrimination in the same structural sense risks diluting the benefits meant for those, who have suffered centuries of exclusion.

The concern is about preserving the integrity of a system designed for a specific historical injury. If individuals, who voluntarily exit the social structure that generated this disadvantage continue to claim those benefits, it constitutes an encroachment upon the rights of those, who remain within that system and continue to experience discrimination.

This is especially relevant as certain groups within the Muslim and Christian communities, citing backwardness or marginalization, have also begun to demand their inclusion in SC reservation. To maintain social balance and constitutional fidelity, the SC category cannot become a universal basket for all disadvantaged groups, nor can it expand in ways that erase its historical purpose.

India's minorities already receive protections and benefits under various frameworks: minority educational institutions, development

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schemes, scholarships, and constitutional safeguards. These mechanisms exist precisely because the Constitution acknowledges their needs.

But SC reservation is not a minority-rights mechanism; it is a caste-based redressal system tied to social hierarchies specific to certain religions. Extending SC reservation to communities that have their own dedicated constitutional safeguards creates duplication, distortion, and administrative confusion.

The High Court's ruling prevents this overlap. It ensures that the reservation system remains coherent and does not evolve into a parallel welfare structure detached from its original purpose.

Public discourse often raises concerns that incentivized or mass conversions — for economic benefits, social mobility, or political influence — can create long-term complexities for governance and identity politics. The policymakers have rightly noted that large-scale, benefit-linked conversions could alter the demographic and constitutional balance that affirmative action relies on.

The real concern needs to be understood on a bigger canvas. If benefits created for a historically oppressed group become accessible through a change of religious identity, the incentive structure of reservation becomes distorted. This is unsustainable and could lead to manipulations that undermine both social harmony and the integrity of constitutional schemes.

The greatest merit of the Allahabad High

Court's decision is that it restores reservation to its foundational purpose: correcting historical caste discrimination, not functioning as a generic poverty-alleviation program or religious entitlement. The ruling reminds the nation that: SC reservation is for historical injuries; it cannot follow an individual into a religion where caste is not doctrinally recognized. Lastly, benefits created for specific social injustices must remain targeted to those injustices. By reinforcing this logic, the Court ensures that affirmative action remains effective, focused, and constitutionally consistent.

The Allahabad High Court's ruling is not merely a legal clarification; it is a reaffirmation of the constitutional architecture of social justice. It protects SC communities from dilution of their rights, preserves the coherence of the reservation framework, and prevents policy distortions driven by demographic or political pressures. In doing so, the Court upholds both constitutional integrity and social stability — ensuring that the reservation system remains what it was always meant to be: a precise, historically grounded tool of justice, not a negotiable benefit open to reinterpretation through changes of religious identity.

While the UP High Court has set a deadline and a specific mechanism to identify individuals, who have been benefiting from SC category reservation, a key question arises regarding practicing Christians, who have not legally changed their religion. This group also needs to be identified and treated equally to maintain social stability and harmony.

## Appeal for financial assistance

**S**ocial 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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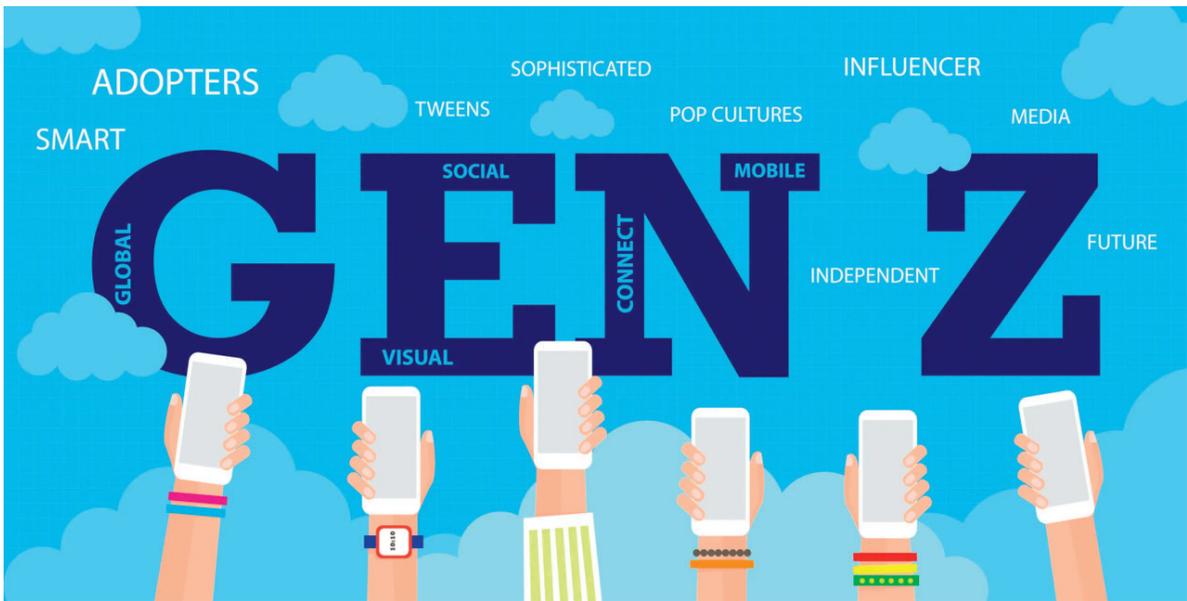


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In the wake of recent political uprisings in Nepal and Bangladesh, Indian politicians have increasingly begun using the term “Gen Z.” Leaders at both national and local levels have been throwing the term around rather casually. RJD MP Sunil Singh drew widespread attention when he warned that a Nepal-like uprising led by Gen Z could erupt if his party lost the Assembly election. He was quoted as saying, “If you defeat the person whom the public has given their mandate, the same scenes you saw on the roads in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka will be seen on the roads of Bihar as well.” Despite this claim, the RJD suffered a heavy defeat, and no such unrest occurred.



## Aspirational Indian Gen Z

Vijendra



The use of the term “Gen Z” is most prominent among non-BJP parties, many of which have been facing repeated electoral setbacks. References to Gen Z have surged noticeably following the political events in Nepal and Bangladesh over the past two years. Yet none of the predicted turmoil has materialized. Large-scale political disturbances like those in Bangladesh, Nepal, or Sri Lanka remain highly unlikely in India for several reasons.

Gen Z generally refers to people born between 1997 and 2012. They follow the Millennial generation (Gen Y) and precede Gen

Alpha. Those born during this period grew up with the internet, smartphones, and social media as integral parts of daily life. Key characteristics often associated with this generation include being digital natives (the first to grow up entirely online), highly tech-savvy, valuing diversity, inclusiveness, and individuality, being socially aware and outspoken, entrepreneurial and creative, and preferring visual, fast-paced, and interactive content.

However, Gen Z in India differs fundamentally from Gen Z in many other countries. Two major factors set Indian Gen Z apart. First, India’s



Constitution is built on a strong balance-of-power framework, ensuring that no single branch of the state becomes dominant. The Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi demonstrated that any extreme action by one organ of the state is neither accepted by the others nor by the public. Second, India's traditional and ancient value system shapes a national mindset distinct from that of other societies. Tolerance and inclusiveness have been defining traits of the Indian outlook since ancient times, and they continue to exert influence today.

India can take pride in the emergence of Gen Z as a significant cultural and political force. In several Western countries, their activism, technological expertise, and assertive identity have driven movements related to climate action, political transparency, LGBTQ+ rights, and economic reform. Analysts often speculate whether India—home to one of the world's largest Gen Z populations—might witness a similar youth-led revolution.

### Constitution Makes the Difference

India's Constitution is designed to ensure that the democratic system remains stable even under the most difficult circumstances. Its key features—particularly the balance of power and the three-tier governance structure—guarantee continuous public participation in the system. For instance, although elections to local self-government bodies in Maharashtra were delayed for nearly three years due to litigation, people still exercised their voting rights in other elections, including those for the Parliament and the State Assembly. Moreover, this delay was specific to Maharashtra; elections continued normally in the rest of the country, including in Kashmir. Viewed in a broader context, accusations that democracy is being suppressed do not hold up. Citizens also participate through mandatory gram sabhas, ensuring that even if one level of governance becomes non-functional, democratic engagement does not stop or create public unrest. Representation at multiple levels protects the core of both democracy and the Constitution.

### Balance of Power

The principle of “balance of power,” often described by constitutional experts as “checks and balances,” is considered one of the strongest democratic safeguards of the Indian Constitution. Designed by framers who deeply understood India's diversity, history, social inequalities, and the need for stable governance, the Constitution distributes authority among the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary. This balance is reinforced by independent institutions such as the Election Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor General, and the Union Public Service Commission. Together, they prevent sudden or radical shifts—including revolutionary movements—from destabilizing the system.

### Checks and Balances

India's parliamentary system ensures the government remains accountable to Parliament, and all changes occur within constitutional boundaries. No individual or group can overturn the system unilaterally; political transitions occur through elections rather than revolutions.

#### The system of checks and balances allows:

- Parliament to oversee the Executive,
- The Judiciary to strike down unconstitutional laws,
- The Executive to dissolve Parliament, when necessary,
- Independent institutions to monitor state functioning.

These mechanisms prevent any group—including Gen Z activists—from capturing power or pushing extreme constitutional changes.

### Judicial Review and the Basic Structure Doctrine

The Supreme Court's authority to uphold the basic structure of the Constitution ensures that:

- Democracy cannot be abolished,
- Fundamental rights remain secure,
- Major constitutional changes cannot occur without judicial examination.

Any attempt that threatens the democratic framework can thus be legally invalidated. For example, the Judiciary has given a landmark decision controlling the power of Union government to impose Presidential Rule in any state (Article 356).

### Federalism Prevents Centralized Movements

India's federal system distributes power across the Union government, 28 states, eight union territories, and local bodies. This dispersion makes it exceedingly difficult for any revolutionary movement to mobilize uniformly across the country's diverse regions.



### **A Robust Electoral System**

Regular elections, peaceful transitions of power, and high voter participation provide citizens—including Gen Z—a reliable avenue to express dissatisfaction. Unlike authoritarian systems where repression fuels uprisings, India's electoral democracy offers a built-in mechanism for change.

### **Strong Administrative Machinery**

India's extensive bureaucratic structure ensures continuity of governance. Even during political upheavals, the administrative system maintains stability. This "steel frame" absorbs shocks that could otherwise lead to disorder or revolutionary agitation.

India's Constitution—supported by layered governance, judicial oversight, a strong federal structure, and resilient institutions—prevents abrupt systemic collapse. It channels all change through orderly, democratic processes. As a result, even if Gen Z were inclined toward radical upheaval, the constitutional framework would naturally guide such impulses toward gradual reform rather than revolt.

family system, which transmits ancient and traditional values from an early age. While some argue that the Indian family structure is facing an existential threat, in practice, people continue to follow family traditions, religious practices, and community norms. Families still play an important role in decisions related to career, marriage, and personal life, and respect for elders remains deeply ingrained. In contrast, Western societies tend to emphasize individualism, early independence, and increasingly liberal lifestyles.

Indian Gen Z represents a distinctive combination of ambition, tradition, digital fluency, and economic practicality. While global Gen Z tends to appear more homogeneous due to shared internet culture, Indian Gen Z stands apart because of its diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, strong family influence, competitive education system, and fast-changing social environment.

India can take pride in the emergence of Gen Z as a significant cultural and political force. In several Western countries, their activism, technological expertise, and assertive identity have driven movements related to climate action, political transparency, LGBTQ+ rights, and economic reform. Analysts often speculate whether India—home to one of the world's largest Gen Z populations—might witness a similar youth-led revolution.

Despite having over 370 million Gen Z individuals, India has not seen a large-scale Gen Z-driven revolution. Indian Gen Z is vibrant on social media, expressive in cultural debates, active in digital spaces, and influential in consumer behavior. Yet a full-fledged political or structural revolution remains unlikely because India's constitutional framework and psychological landscape create conditions that favor gradual transformation rather than abrupt upheaval. This analysis explains the combined influence of these factors on India's Gen Z.

India has, in essence, been democratic since ancient times and has weathered multiple political crises such as Partition, insurgencies, and the Emergency. The country experienced coalition governments for more than two decades, but its political system remained stable. The core reason is India's enduring commitment to democratic values, tolerance, and inclusiveness—qualities rarely found in the same measure elsewhere. As scholar Ronald Inden observed, "Indian political culture has historically rested on negotiated order rather than absolute rupture," highlighting why India's societal fabric naturally resists radical revolutions.

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While the Constitution provides a strong safeguard against undemocratic developments, India's social fabric and collective psyche also prevent the rise of anti-democratic elements. After independence, several Western thinkers doubted whether India would be able to maintain its territorial unity. Yet, despite repeated attempts by vested interests to fuel divisions, India has remained an integrated nation. Pakistan, by contrast, split within 25 years due to deep differences in the psychological outlook of its people. India, however, has sustained unity despite vast socio-economic diversity. Although India is often praised for its "Unity in Diversity," the deeper truth is that it exemplifies "Diversity in Unity."

### **What sets apart Indian Gen Z?**

A major factor that sets India apart is its



In *Jitendra Sahani v. State of U.P.* (2025), the Allahabad High Court ruled that Scheduled Caste benefits under the Constitution (SC) Order, 1950 apply only to Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist faiths. Allegations showed the applicant embraced Christianity while availing SC benefits, amounting to misrepresentation. The Court rejected his plea under Section 482 CrPC, upheld proceedings under IPC Sections 153-A and 295-A, and ordered an inquiry into his religious status and affidavit authenticity.

## Allahabad High Court Orders Probe Into **Misuse of SC Certificates After Religious Conversion**



# 'No more SC Benefits for Converted Christians'

Ritik



In a landmark directive that has reignited debates on affirmative action, religious conversion, and constitutional fidelity, the Allahabad High Court has ordered the Uttar Pradesh government to halt Scheduled Caste (SC) benefits for individuals, who convert to Christianity. Delivered on December 2, 2025, in a case involving petitioner Jitendra Sahani, the ruling labels such claims as a 'fraud on the Constitution.'

The court has mandated district magistrates (DMs) and superintendents of police (SPs) to identify and prevent these instances within four months, underscoring a zero-tolerance approach to misuse of reservation quotas. This decision not only reinforces the letter of the law but

also spotlights longstanding tensions between religious freedom and social justice in India.

As the nation grapples with evolving demographics and policy challenges, this article delves into the nuances of the ruling. We explore its core implications, its potential ripple effects on a pending Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court, the on-ground realities of reservation benefits for converts, the specific fallout for those embracing Islam, and the spectre of quota encroachment on Hindu communities.

Drawing from judicial precedents, expert analyses, and socio-legal studies, we aim to unpack how this verdict could reshape India's reservation landscape. A safeguard



against constitutional fraud at its heart, the Allahabad High Court's directive is a clarion call to enforce the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950—a foundational document that explicitly ties SC status and its attendant benefits to adherents of Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. The order stipulates that conversion to religions like Christianity or Islam severs one's caste identity, as these faiths ostensibly lack the hierarchical caste system central to SC backwardness.

Justice Rajesh Kumar Pandey, in dismissing Sahani's plea to quash a criminal case against him for allegedly converting while retaining SC perks, emphasized that post-conversion retention of benefits amounts to fraudulently claiming benefits since there is no caste system in Christianity'. What does this mean in practical terms? For the UP government, it translates to immediate administrative action: a comprehensive audit of SC certificate holders to verify religious adherence. DMs must now scrutinize applications, leveraging tools like affidavits, community inquiries, and inter-departmental coordination to weed out fraudulent claims. The court has fixed a stringent four-month timeline, after which non-compliance could invite contempt proceedings. This is not mere paperwork; it's a systemic overhaul aimed at preserving the integrity of reservations, which are constitutionally mandated under Articles 15, 16, and 46 to uplift historically oppressed groups without dilution.

The ruling's philosophical underpinning is equally profound. It echoes the Supreme Court's 2024 observation that religious conversions undertaken solely to avail reservation benefits without genuine belief" constitute a fraud on the Constitution. By invoking this, the High Court positions itself as a bulwark against 'quota tourism' — where individuals ostensibly convert for spiritual reasons but cling to material gains. For affected families, it means potential revocation of jobs, educational seats, and welfare schemes like scholarships or housing allotments. In Sahan's case, investigations revealed he had preached from the 'authorities of Jesus Christ' while enjoying SC status, prompting the court to question if such duality undermines the social ethos of reservations.

Critics, including Christian advocacy groups, argue this overlooks the persistence of caste discrimination within minority communities. Dalit Christians, they contend, face 'double discrimination'—ostracized by upper-caste co-religionists yet ineligible for SC safeguards. However, the court's logic is unyielding: benefits are not perpetual entitlements but targeted

remedies for caste-based subjugation, which conversion is

presumed to erase. This ruling, therefore, means a tighter gatekeeping mechanism, potentially reducing misuse but also risking overreach in verifying 'genuine' faith—a slippery slope in a secular republic. In essence, the verdict is a reset button for UP's reservation machinery, prioritizing constitutional purity over expansive interpretations. It signals to other states that judicial oversight will intensify, possibly inspiring similar probes nationwide.

The Allahabad High Court's order arrives amid a simmering national discourse, particularly as it intersects with a long-pending PIL in the Supreme Court seeking SC status for Dalit Christians and Muslims. Titled Soosai Anthony v. Union of India (a 1980 case that evolved into broader petitions), this litigation challenges the 1950 Order's exclusionary clause, arguing it discriminates against converts who endure

**The Allahabad ruling spotlights this chasm, mandating probes that could expose thousands more cases. Yet, without broader reforms—like the proposed creamy layer exclusion for affluent SCs—the system risks weaponization. Ground reality? A tug-of-war where fraud thrives in under-resourced districts, while converts pleas echo in empty halls. The verdict may curb the former but amplifies the latter invisibility.**

social and economic backwardness akin to SC Hindus. As of December 2025, the matter remains unresolved, with the SC repeatedly deferring hearings amid calls for empirical data on Dalit minorities' plight.

#### **Will the UP ruling sway this PIL?**

Undoubtedly, it bolsters the conservative flank. The High Court's emphasis on 'fraud' and strict timelines provides fresh ammunition for opponents of inclusion, who can cite it as evidence of rampant misuse—diluting quotas meant for original SC beneficiaries. Legal scholars note that lower court decisions, while not binding on the SC, often serve as persuasive precedents, especially when aligned with apex court rhetoric. The SC's November 2024 bench,



led by Justice B.R. Gavai, had already cautioned against conversions as ‘grabs’ terming them violative of the policy and social ethos. The Allahabad verdict amplifies this, potentially tipping the scales toward rejection of the PIL. Yet, it’s not a foregone conclusion. Proponents of reform, backed by reports from the National Commission for Minorities, highlight that excluding Dalit converts perpetuates inequality—over 2.5 million Dalit Christians and 4 million Dalit Muslims reportedly live in limbo, accessing only weaker OBC or general quotas.

A 2023 Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission recommendation (still unimplemented) urged delinking SC benefits from religion, a reform the PIL champions. If the SC views the UP ruling as overly punitive—risking harassment of genuine converts—it could pivot toward inclusion, perhaps with safeguards like sub-quotas. The interplay is dynamic. The PIL’s outcome could override the High Court.

But delays (exacerbated by backlogs) mean the UP directive operates in the interim. This creates a federal patchwork—states like Tamil Nadu already extend partial benefits via executive orders, while UP’s crackdown hardens. Ultimately, the SC PIL hangs in balance, but the Allahabad order injects urgency, forcing a reckoning on whether reservations should evolve beyond religious silos.

A Patchwork of Misuse, Marginalization, and Legal Limbo is on paper; India’s reservation system is a beacon of equity; in practice, it’s a labyrinth where converts navigate fraud, exclusion, and advocacy. The 1950 Order’s religious caveat has long been contested, yet enforcement remains sporadic. Ground reports from UP and beyond reveal a dual reality: widespread fraudulent claims alongside genuine hardship for converts. Data from the 2011 Census (with 2025 projections estimating similar trends) shows SC populations at 16.6% nationally, but converts—estimated at 1-2% of Dalits annually—often retain certificates through lax verification. A 2024 UP government audit uncovered over 5,000 dubious SC claims in Prayagraj alone, many linked to Christian missions offering conversion incentives like jobs or education. This misuse erodes trust, with Hindu SC leaders decrying leakage that squeezes opportunities in competitive sectors like government hiring, where SC quotas hover at 15%. Conversely, legitimate Dalit converts face erasure. In Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, Dalit Christians report caste-based violence from within churches, yet lose SC perks upon baptism—pushing them into poverty traps.

The Sachar Committee (2006) and Ranganath

Mishra reports documented this reservation vacuum’ estimating Dalit Muslims poverty rate at 31% versus 21% for SC Hindus. Legally, courts have flip-flopped: a 2015 SC ruling allowed reconversion to Hinduism for quota restoration, but barred opportunistic switches.

The Allahabad ruling spotlights this chasm, mandating probes that could expose thousands more cases. Yet, without broader reforms—like the proposed creamy layer exclusion for affluent SCs—the system risks weaponization. Ground reality? A tug-of-war where fraud thrives in under-resourced districts, while converts pleas echo in empty halls. The verdict may curb the former but amplifies the latter invisibility.

While the Allahabad directive targets Christian converts, its logic inexorably extends to those embracing Islam, given the 1950 Order’s blanket exclusion of non-Hindu faiths. In UP, home to 19 million Muslims (including a significant Dalit cohort), this could trigger cascading effects—revocations, investigations, and heightened scrutiny.

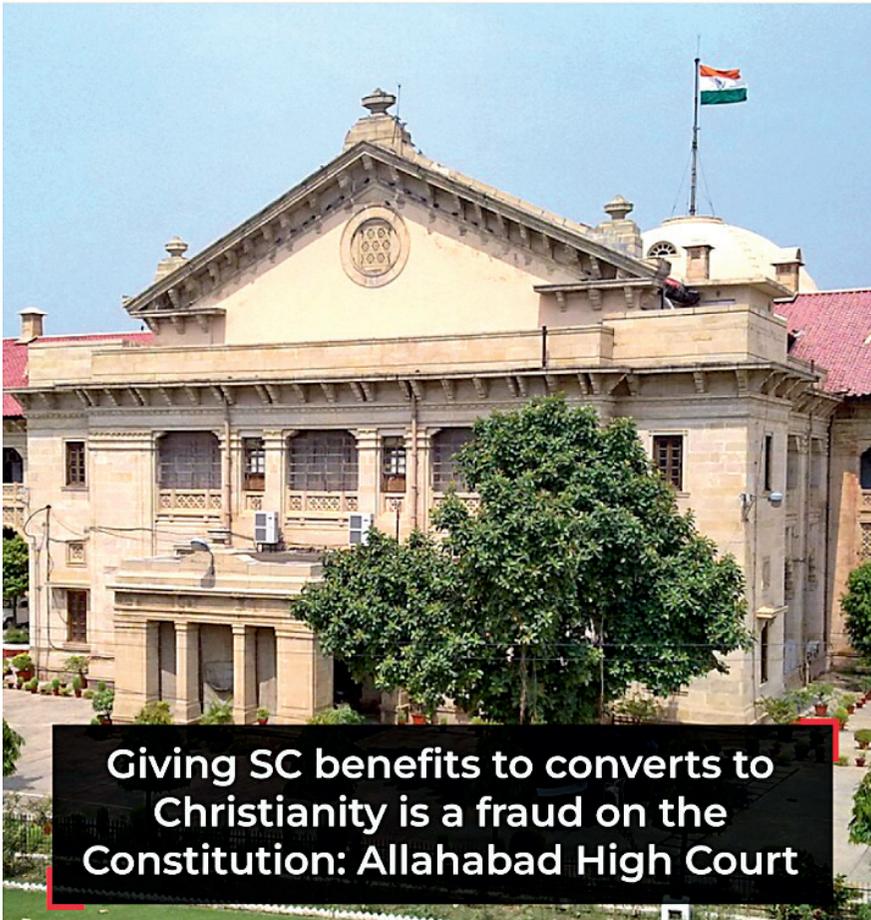
For Pasmanda (backward) Muslims, many from SC origins, the fallout is stark. Pre-ruling, lax enforcement allowed crypto-converts to retain benefits; now, DMs must probe religious shifts, potentially invalidating thousands of certificates. A 2025 NCRB report noted a 15% uptick in UP complaints against quota fraud involving Muslim converts, often in education and police recruitment.

The court’s four-month deadline pressures officials to act swiftly, risking arbitrary denials—e.g., a Dalit-turned-Muslim teacher in Lucknow facing job loss over an unverified conversion date.

#### **Broader impacts include social friction**

Islamic organizations like the All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz fear stigmatization, arguing the ruling revives anti-conversion narratives that portray Muslims as encroachers. Economically, it hits hard: OBC quotas for Muslims (via the 27% pool) are no panacea, as they overlap with SC slots, leading to intra-minority competition.

In states like Bihar, similar probes post-2024 SC rulings displaced 2,000+beneficiaries. Mitigation? Advocacy for a separate Dalit Muslim subcategory persists, but the UP order hardens resistance. For converts, it means navigating a hostile terrain—faith affirmed, futures imperilled. This selective enforcement (focusing on Christians first) underscores a perceived bias, yet the principle binds all, portending a quota winter for Islamic converts. Ground Truths and the Hindu Quota Conundrums Is there a real risk of converts encroaching on constitutional



## Giving SC benefits to converts to Christianity is a fraud on the Constitution: Allahabad High Court



rights of Hindu SCs? Ground realities affirm yes, albeit nuanced—fraudulent claims do siphon opportunities, but systemic flaws amplify the threat.

Empirical evidence abounds: A 2024 IIT Delhi study found 8-10% of UP's SC admissions riddled with ghosts' beneficiaries, many converts masquerading as Hindus. This dilutes the 15% quota, forcing genuine SC Hindus into general merit pools amid cut-throat competition (e.g. NEET seats where SC cutoffs rose 5% post-misuse spikes). In rural UP, where 70% of SCs farm, welfare diversions mean fewer PDS allocations or MGNREGA days for Hindu families. The possibility is not just plausible but probable without vigilant enforcement. Reservations embody Article 46's directive for SC upliftment—a Hindu-centric legacy of Dr Ambedkar's vision. Converts claims, even if 5% of the pool, erode this by inflating demand, per a 2023 NITI Aayog simulation showing 2-3% opportunity loss for Hindu SCs annually. Politically incorrect as it sounds, unchecked conversion incentives (tied to missionary funding) risk & colonization, were numerical minorities leverage fluidity to outpace static Hindu claimants.

Yet, balance tempers alarm. Most converts shun quotas, facing their own barriers. The solution? Tech-driven verification (Aadhaar-linked faith declarations) and sub-categorization to ring-fence Hindu SC shares. The Allahabad ruling is a prophylactic, curbing encroachment while inviting dialogue on inclusive reforms. Absent this, Hindu fold anxieties—rooted in demographic shifts—could fuel polarization.

The Allahabad High Court's fiat is more than a directive; it's a mirror to India's reservation paradoxes—noble intent clashing with human ingenuity. It fortifies constitutional ramparts against fraud, pressures the SC PIL toward caution, exposes converts dual realities, and guards Hindu equities without wholly alienating minorities. As UP implements this over the next months, the true test lies in equity: preventing misuse without punishing belief. In a diverse democracy, true justice demands quotas that heal, not harden, divides. Only then can the Constitution's promise transcend faith frontiers.

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**Bihar Assembly election has thrown a surprise with NDA getting landslide victory. For the first time in its history, Bihar voters set aside caste considerations. Caste factor did not overpower voters. Neither youths nor men/women. This could be a new beginning for Bihar as the `labharthi` vote bank has taken the driving seat while the caste factor remains on the back seat.**

## **Bihar Elections: A Civilisational Realignment**

Satyajit



**B**ihar Assembly election delivered a verdict that will echo through India's political history. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the BJP and Nitish Kumar's JD(U), swept to a staggering landslide, capturing over 200 of the 243 assembly seats—a margin that crushed the opposition Mahagathbandhan and redefined the state's electoral landscape. This was not merely a routine power shift; it marked a profound civilisational realignment, where Bihar's voters transcended entrenched caste divisions, regional loyalties, and socio-economic barriers to vote as a unified Hindu bloc.

For years, sceptics dismissed the notion of a consolidated `Hindu vote bank` as ideological exaggeration. The 2025 results shattered that

myth. Hindus, cutting across OBCs, EBCs, Dalits, and upper castes—representing nearly 80% of the population—coalesced behind the NDA's blend of welfare delivery, law and order restoration, and cultural resonance. The once-mighty Muslim-Yadav (MY) axis collapsed, caste satraps lost their grip, and appeasement politics was decisively rejected.

Driven by direct benefits from schemes like Ujjwala, Ayushman Bharat, and free rations, a new `labharthi samaj` emerged, prioritizing gratitude and aspiration over traditional intermediaries. Women voters, in particular, played a pivotal role, rewarding stability and dignity. This election signalled the end of fragmentation and the rise of ideological unity—a transformative moment



for Bihar and beyond.

The dust has barely settled on the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections, but one thing is crystal clear: this was not just another poll where parties swapped seats and alliances realigned. No, this was something deeper, almost tectonic—a civilisational shift that redefined how Bihar votes. For the first time in decades, the state did not fracture along its familiar fault lines of caste, class, or region. Instead, Bihar voted as a unified bloc, with Hindus across the spectrum coming together in a way that shattered old myths and rewrote the rules of its politics.

Analysts have long dismissed the idea of a 'Hindu vote bank' as a fantasy, a bogeyman conjured by critics of Hindutva. But 2025 put that debate to bed. The Hindu vote emerged not as a whisper but as a roar—a cohesive force so powerful it dismantled the caste arithmetic that had dominated Bihar since the Mandal era. This election signalled the collapse of rigid caste silos, the crumbling of the Muslim-Yadav (MY) axis, the end of appeasement politics, and, most profoundly, the debunking of the notion that Hindus in Bihar could never unite. What we witnessed was not mere politics; it was a cultural awakening, a reclaiming of identity that transcended generations of division.

### **Shattering of Caste Blocs**

Bihar's political landscape has always been a jigsaw puzzle of castes, each piece locked in by historical loyalties and power brokers. Yadavs stuck with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Muslims gravitated toward any anti-BJP coalition, Kurmis backed Janata Dal (United), Kushwaha's split their allegiances, Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) shifted like sand, and Dalits fragmented between leaders like Chirag Paswan and local strongmen. This formula, etched into Bihar's DNA for over three decades, seemed unbreakable—until now.

The 2025 results revealed a profound erosion of this caste exclusivity. A massive swath of non-Yadav OBCs, EBCs, Dalits, and Mahadalits turned their backs on the old guard, who had long treated their communities as captive vote banks. Even among Yadavs, traditionally the RJD's ironclad base, cracks appeared. What drove this? A cocktail of factors: effective welfare delivery, restored law and order, the allure of cultural unity, and a growing unease about minority vote dominance. These elements forged an ideological bond that pulled Hindus into a shared alignment, overriding the pull of caste.

Take the Yadav bloc, for instance—comprising about 14.26% of Bihar's population and the RJD's historical lifeline. This time, it showed deep fissures. Generational fatigue played a big role;

younger Yadavs have no romantic attachment to the 1990s 'social justice' movement led by Lalu Prasad Yadav. Their memories are of economic stagnation, rampant unemployment, and the chaos of 'Jungle Raj'.

Tejaswi Yadav, Lalu's son and the RJD's face, came across as uninspiring—politically green and ideologically vacant. His reluctance to address reforms like the Waqf Act alienated Hindu voters outright, while his family-centric dynasty insulted even the party's loyalists. The outcome? A notable drift of Yadavs toward the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and fringe parties, effectively collapsing the MY axis that had propped up the RJD for so long.

The 2023 caste survey laid bare Bihar's demographics: OBCs at 27.13%, EBCs at 36.01%, Scheduled Castes (SCs) at 19.65%, Scheduled Tribes (STs) at 1.68%, and general castes at 15.52%. Parties had weaponized these numbers for years, playing a game of caste chess. But the BJP-JD(U) alliance flipped the script by overlaying an ideological framework: Hindu commonality over caste fragmentation. This approach rallied nearly 80% of Bihar's Hindu population, spanning over 20 caste groups. The RJD's outdated strategy—banking on Yadavs and Muslims—simply could not compete against such a broad, pan-Hindu coalition.

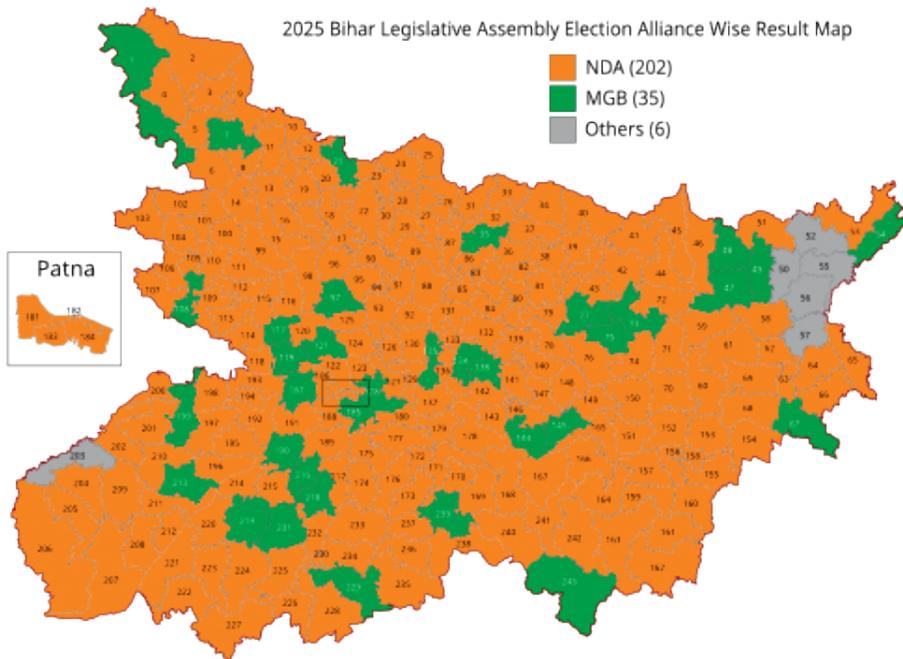
### **Rejecting Ghosts of Jungle Raj**

The rejection of the RJD's legacy was visceral, especially among Dalits, EBCs, and SCs who bore the brunt of the lawlessness in the 1990s. 'Jungle Raj' was not just a slogan; it evoked memories of kidnappings, extortion, and social anarchy that hit the poorest hardest. The NDA's narrative of stability resonated deeply, pulling these groups away from fragmented caste alliances and toward a promise of order and progress.

### **Welfare as Glue of Ideological Shift**

At the heart of this transformation was welfare delivery, which the NDA wielded not just as policy but as an ideological anchor. Schemes like Ujjwala (free LPG cylinders), free rations under Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, Ayushman Bharat (health insurance), and PM Awas Yojana (housing) built a reservoir of gratitude and trust.

These were not abstract promises; they were tangible lifelines that improved daily existence in a state plagued by poverty. This birthed a new social identity: the 'labharthi samaj' or beneficiary class, transcending caste lines. For the first time, voters in the polling booth did not identify primarily as Yadav, Paswan, Kurmi, or Rajput. They saw themselves as recipients of direct benefits that bypassed corrupt middlemen.



In Bihar, where caste leaders once acted as gatekeepers—doling out favours through local networks like mukhiyas or pradhans—the central government’s direct transfers revolutionized the power dynamic.

Imagine a Dalit family in rural Bihar receiving a pucca house without greasing palms, or a widow getting her pension straight into her bank account. These are not minor perks; they were dignity-restoring shifts for generations mired in poverty. With 60-70% of households touching at least one welfare scheme, this beneficiary class became a massive electoral force—grateful, aspirational, and loyal to the system that delivered.

#### How Welfare Dismantled Caste Empires

For three decades, Bihar was ruled by caste satraps, each commanding a fiefdom of voters. The RJD lorded over Yadavs and Muslims; JD(U) courted Kurmis, EBCs, women, and Mahadalits; smaller outfits carved niches among Jat’s, Rajput’s, Bhumihar’s, Paswan’s, and Kushwaha’s. Welfare punctured these empires. Benefits flowed indiscriminately—a Ravidas woman in Gaya got the same health coverage as a Kushwaha man in Bhojpur. Direct bank transfers eliminated the need for caste brokers, weakening the very foundations of these power structures.

Yadav youth, once dependent on RJD networks for jobs, now eyed central schemes for real empowerment. Dalit families, particularly Paswans and Ravidas communities, placed more faith in the NDA’s ecosystem than in leaders whose rhetoric rarely materialized into change. EBCs, Bihar’s largest demographic at

36%, experienced welfare on a grand scale, shifting their loyalty from local satraps to a centralized, efficient state. This vacuum was ripe for Hindutva’s message of unity. The BJP filled it by emphasizing a shared Hindu identity, turning welfare into a bridge to cultural consolidation.

#### Silent Power of Women Voters

No discussion of this shift is complete without highlighting women’s role. As the primary recipients in most poor households—managing free rations, Ujjwal cylinders, housing aid, health coverage, and even Swachh Bharat toilets—women formed the backbone of the beneficiary class. Their turnout in 2025 spiked dramatically, and they overwhelmingly backed the NDA’s blend of governance and Hindutva. Why? Women prioritize safety, order, and dignity above all. They remember Jungle Raj’s anarchy as a personal nightmare. The NDA’s cultural politics resonated too, tying into everyday rituals like Chhath Puja, Raksha Bandhan, and Durga Puja. This made women’s consolidation not just electoral but enduring—a silent revolution reshaping Bihar’s politics.

#### A New Chapter for Bihar

The 2025 verdict is not a fleeting win; it’s a harbinger of lasting change. By uniting Hindus beyond caste, dismantling outdated axes like MY, and leveraging welfare to build trust, the NDA has crafted a new political grammar. Bihar, long synonymous with fragmentation, now stands as a testament to unity power. As the state moves forward, this civilisational realignment could inspire similar shifts elsewhere in India.

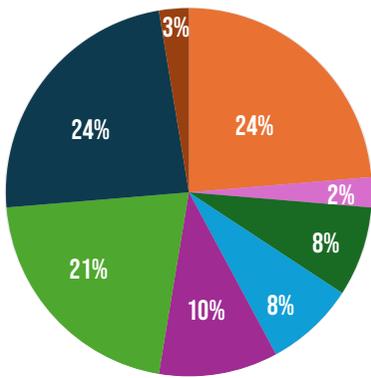
*Author is Senior journalist  
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### Assembly Election 2020- SC reserved Seats

Party Name	SC Seats won
Bharatiya Janta Party	9
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	1
Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)(Liberation)	3
Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular)	3
Indian National Congress	4
Janata Dal (United)	8
Rashtriya Janata Dal	9
Vikasheel Insaan Party	1

In 2020 Bihar Assembly election 38 seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes. In this election BJP and Rashtriya Janata Dal won 9 seats each, Communist party of India (M) and Vikasheel Insaan Party won 1 seat each, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation) Party and Hindustani Awam Morcha won 3 seats each, Indian National Congress won 4 seats and Janata Dal (United) won 8 seats.



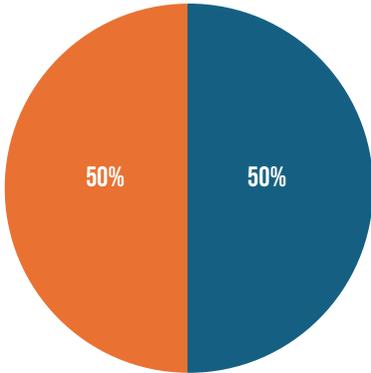
#### SC Seats Won

- Bharatiya Janta Party
- Communist Party of India (Marxist)
- Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)(Liberation)
- Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular)
- Indian National Congress
- Janata Dal (United)
- Rashtriya Janata Dal
- Vikasheel Insaan Party

### Assembly Election 2020- ST reserved Seats

Party Name	ST Seats won
Bharatiya Janta Party	1
Indian National Congress	1

In 2020 Bihar Assembly election 2 seats were reserved for Scheduled Tribe. In this election BJP and Indian National Congress won 1 seat each.



#### ST Seats won

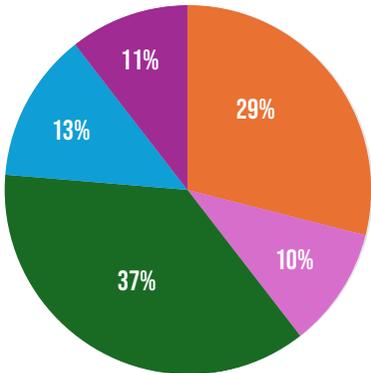
- Bharatiya Janta Party
- Indian National Congress



### Assembly Election 2025- SC reserved Seats

Party Name	SC Seats won
Bharatiya Janta Party	11
Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular)	4
Janata Dal (United)	14
Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas)	5
Rashtriya Janata Dal	4

In 2025 Bihar Assembly election 38 seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes. In this election BJP won 11 seats, Hindustani Awam Morcha won 4 seats, Janata Dal (United) won 14 seats, Lok Janshakta Party (Ram Vilas) won 5 seats and Rashtriya Janata Dal won 4 seats.



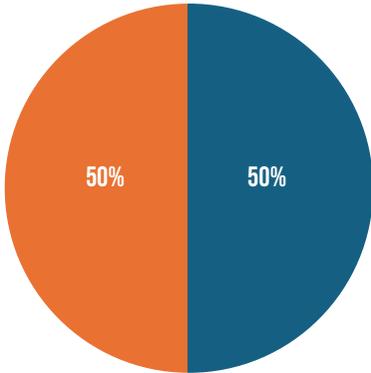
**SC Seats Won**

- Bharatiya Janta Party
- Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular)
- Janata Dal (United)
- Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas)
- Rashtriya Janata Dal

### Assembly Election 2025- ST reserved Seats

Party Name	ST Seats won
Bharatiya Janta Party	1
Indian National Congress	1

In 2025 Bihar Assembly election 2 seats were reserved for Scheduled Tribe. In this election BJP and Indian National Congress won 1 seat each.



**ST Seats won**

- Bharatiya Janta Party
- Indian National Congress



**Path to  
Sustainable  
Development:  
Industrialization,  
Circular Economy,  
and Human-  
Centric Policies**

Baby

**Today, India is decisively stepping into a new era of industrialization and entrepreneurship, supported by innovative education, skill development, and forward-looking policies such as “Make in India” and the National Skill Development Mission. Having recently crossed the \$4 trillion economic milestone, India is poised to become one of the world’s fastest-growing major economies over the next decade.**

India stands at a historic crossroads. Over the past few decades, the country has achieved remarkable progress in agriculture and the service sector. Millions of farmers now benefit from improved irrigation, modern seeds, and technology-driven farming methods, while the service sector—including IT, finance, and healthcare—has become a backbone of the economy. Yet, the delayed focus on industrialization meant India fell behind in claiming its expected position in the global production landscape. Manufacturing hubs that could have been world-class remained underdeveloped, and export potential was not fully realized.

Infrastructure projects are booming, industries are expanding, and cities are rapidly urbanizing. Metro rails, smart cities, logistics corridors, and industrial clusters are changing the country’s economic geography. This growth is fuelling rising demand for metals, steel,



minerals, and other natural resources. With over 1.5 billion people, India's consumption of goods is skyrocketing, making sustainable resource management an urgent necessity. Without careful planning, this growth could strain water, energy, and material resources, leading to environmental degradation and public health challenges.

### **Beyond Consumption: Redefining Lifestyles**

Sustainable development in India is not just about producing more—it's about living better. True progress requires moving beyond a consumption-driven mindset toward lifestyles that value balance, well-being, and harmony with nature. A developed India cannot be defined solely by GDP numbers, skyscrapers, or technological marvels; it must be measured by the quality of life its citizens enjoy, including clean air, access to green spaces, and mental and physical well-being.

Imagine walking through a neighborhood where tree-lined streets provide natural cooling, children play safely in open parks, and bicycles are as common as cars. Imagine a city where rooftop gardens and community composting transform organic waste into usable resources. This vision demonstrates that development must be human-centric and environmentally conscious. When lifestyles shift from mindless consumption to conscious coexistence with nature, prosperity becomes meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable. Small lifestyle choices—like preferring reusable packaging, reducing single-use plastics, conserving water, or adopting energy-efficient practices—can collectively have a massive impact. By promoting pollution-free surroundings, mindful resource use, and community-oriented living, India can cultivate a culture where economic growth and environmental stewardship go hand in hand.

#### **Learning from world:**

India can draw important lessons from the successes and pitfalls of other nations. In the United States, rapid product turnover and constant innovation fuel economic dynamism. Products are frequently replaced with newer versions, and old products are recycled into high-quality scrap. Even packaging materials are sold as "premium scrap" and reused efficiently. While this system maintains economic activity, it heavily depends on the continuous consumption of natural resources and generates significant carbon emissions. China leveraged its large population and low-cost production, using recycled materials to dominate global markets with inexpensive

goods—a strategy often described as a "dumping economy." This approach propelled China to become the world's third-largest economy. However, it also led to serious consequences, including environmental degradation, public health crises, and uneven human development.

The lesson is clear: rapid growth alone is not enough. Growth must be sustainable, balanced, and human-centered. India has the opportunity to chart a path that avoids the extremes of wasteful consumption or environmental neglect. With the energy of the world's largest youth population and centuries-old traditions of simplicity, discipline, and nature-friendly living, India can achieve economic success while modelling prosperity in harmony with nature.

#### **Guiding next generation**

Today's youth are natural inheritors of sustainable values. From traditional festivals emphasizing minimal waste to age-old farming practices that replenish the soil, India has a strong foundation for responsible living. Yet, without guidance in technology and consumer culture, this generation risks falling into unhealthy lifestyles dominated by digital distractions, sedentary habits, and excessive competition.

India's development journey must empower humans through technology, ensure industries minimize environmental strain, and measure societal progress not just in production but in health, hygiene, mental well-being, and social prosperity.

Educational programs, community workshops, and digital literacy initiatives can instil a sense of responsibility toward the environment. Young entrepreneurs in the recycling, clean energy, and sustainable agriculture sectors can demonstrate that profitability and environmental stewardship are not mutually exclusive. By nurturing this mindset, India can cultivate generations of citizens who view development as a balance between economic opportunity and ecological responsibility.

This is India's historic moment—to demonstrate that development is not just speed or consumption, but balance, responsibility, and securing a safe future for the next generation. With the right policies and conscious citizens, India can emerge as a sustainable, human-centered developed nation.

#### **Culture, values, and environment:**

Sustainable development must draw deeply from India's cultural heritage, social values, and nature-connected lifestyles. Policies cannot



focus solely on industrial output; they must integrate resource efficiency, environmental protection, public health, and circular economy principles.

**Key focus areas include:**

**Sustainable Industrialization:** Industries should operate efficiently while minimizing environmental impact, adopting green technologies and cleaner production processes.  
**Resource Efficiency and Recycling:** Promote reuse and recycling to reduce dependence on imports, conserve raw materials, and lower energy consumption.

**Environmental Protection and Public Health:** Incorporate eco-friendly measures in urban planning, industrial policies, and public infrastructure to safeguard communities.



**Human-Centric Economic Growth:** Ensure that economic progress directly improves citizens' health, well-being, and quality of life.

By combining India's cultural wisdom with modern strategies, the nation can achieve economic strength while remaining socially inclusive and environmentally responsible. Cities designed with nature in mind, industries operating in harmony with local ecosystems, and citizens' parents can transform this waste into jobs, industrial opportunities, and environmental benefits.

A circular economy approach not only reduces environmental pressure but also fosters entrepreneurship, creates employment, and transforms waste into national wealth. Startups focusing on e-waste recycling, upcycling plastics, or converting organic waste to bioenergy can become engines of sustainable growth. Municipalities that integrate formal and informal recycling systems can ensure fair wages for workers, proper sorting and segregation of materials, and higher recycling rates. With a coordinated approach,

India can move from waste management as a burden to waste management as an opportunity, contributing to both the economy and the environment.

**Achieving Net-Zero and Holistic Growth**

India has committed to net-zero carbon emissions by 2070 and aims for 50% of energy from non-fossil sources by 2030. Meeting these targets requires: Low-carbon, green industries minimizing greenhouse gas emissions Adoption of renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, and bioenergy Conservation of natural resources, including water, soil, and forests. Development of recycling and resource recovery industries. Environmentally responsible infrastructure integrating green building and sustainable transport. True development balances economic prosperity, environmental protection, social welfare, and human health. Through human-centered policies, circular economy practices, and scientific recycling, India can value both natural and human resources Foster innovation in recycling and waste management, Promote inclusive industrial growth, Reduce environmental harm while supporting urbanization and industrialization.

By implementing these strategies, India can not only achieve developed nation status but also offer the world a model of sustainable, prosperous growth, where lifestyle, environment, resource management, and social well-being are harmoniously integrated.

**India's Moment of Opportunity**

India is uniquely positioned to demonstrate a new paradigm of development—one that is sustainable, inclusive, and human-centered. Its youth, cultural values, traditional ecological knowledge, and modern technological capabilities form a strong foundation. By integrating circular economy principles, low-carbon industries, and human-focused policies, India can achieve economic growth without compromising the planet or the well-being of its citizens.

This is not merely a vision for the future—it is an achievable reality. The time to act is now. With conscious governance, innovative industries, and engaged citizens, India can show the world that development is not only about speed and consumption, but balance, responsibility, and building a safe, prosperous future for generations to come.

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The unprecedented enforcement of a 50% US tariff on Indian goods marks a severe and sudden deterioration in bilateral relations, highlighting the diplomatic and economic strain between the two nations after two decades of nurturing a strategic relationship. This unprecedented tariff, a 25% Reciprocal Tariff coupled with a punitive tariff of 25%, is an economic weapon aimed at India's independent foreign policy choices.

## Impact of US Tariffs on Indian Industries

Ritika



The official rationale provided by the US government for the additional tariffs on India is the funding of Russia's war in Ukraine by India through the purchase of discounted Russian oil. The very reasoning is undermined by the US itself, which continues to engage in substantial material imports from Russia, such as fertilisers, Uranium fuel and metals, and the hypocrisy of putting pressure on its prospective strategic allies and partners. Furthermore, the severity of the tariff is linked to diplomatic and personal rifts. The subject of Russian oil imports was never the main focus, but instead reflected President Donald Trump's response to India's unwillingness to publicly affirm that

he mediated the India-Pakistan ceasefire in May 2025, highlighting the difference between India's 50% tariff and Pakistan's much lower 19% duty by the end of May 2025 – in exchange for Pakistan repaying public credit.

The 50% discriminatory tariff immediately creates a commercial viability crisis for India's labour-intensive products, as they have put Indian products at a considerable disadvantage compared to competitors, such as Vietnam, Bangladesh, and others, which are placed in a lower tariff bracket. Quantifiable data bears out the economic implications: the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) reported a massive 28.5% drop in India's total exports to the US within five months of the





tariff increase, with the most significant impacts seen in high employment sectors like textiles, leather, gems & jewellery, all contributing to a collective drop of 31.2%. This significant shrinkage has led Indian MSMEs to offer deep discounts or divert shipments, triggering job losses and an immediate humanitarian crisis in priority manufacturing clusters.

### **Impact on Leather and Other Labour-Intensive Industries**

The Indian leather industry, with a turnover of approximately Rs 56,000 crore (approximately \$6.3 billion), is a highly critical industry worldwide and a significant employer of low-skilled labour, especially in clusters like Tamil Nadu (Ambur), Agra, and Kanpur. The industry's overall vulnerability stems from being export-oriented, with the revenue from overseas companies accounting for around 70%. The US market accounts for around 22% which is second to the EU (over 50%). This sector has been instantly bludgeoned under the punitive US 50% tariff, whereby the simultaneous combination of the initial 25% reciprocal tariff with the extra 25% penalty (for purchase of Russian oil) effectively increases the final cost of Indian finished leather items considerably above that of competitors such as Cambodia, Italy, Vietnam and France, which are subject to lower US tariff rates of between 15%-20% for their finished products. The expert forecasts have heightened the seriousness of the crisis. The ratings predict 10%-12% lower total annual industry revenues than in the previous fiscal year and suggest a steep decline in export volume of 13%-14%. This revenue impact is further exacerbated as the majority of exports to the US involve higher-value finished leather products, such as shoes and accessories, that earn higher realisations, meaning that the loss of such orders has a disproportionate impact on profitability. The immediate effect has been severe for the smaller MSMEs, which account for the bulk of the sector, as many tanneries and small manufacturing units in India have been forced to close down over the past couple of months after similar orders were cancelled. Production has come to an end, inducing a significant change in supply chains as US buyers have refused to accept orders due to increased tariffs, making it difficult for businesses to survive.

Moreover, the economic fallout from the 50% US tariff is not solely for individual sectors; instead, it has caused nationwide structural damage and generalised macroeconomic turbulence, beginning with the downfall of India's crucial, labour-intensive export sectors.

The textile and clothing industry, which employs low-skilled workers, also showed a major decline in exports in October 2025, by 12.91% compared to the previous year. The Indian textile industry faces a significant price disadvantage, as it is subject to a 50% tariff compared to the regional competitors, such as Vietnam and Bangladesh, which face a 20% tariff. This has compelled Indian manufacturers to offer huge discounts to retain the existing US buyers, shrinking already thin margins and rendering production unachievable for many MSMEs. Likewise, the Gemstone and Jewellery industry has borne a significant brunt, with exports to the US dropping sharply by over 40% between April and September 2025, placing millions of jobs at risk in major manufacturing and processing hubs like Surat and Mumbai. The broader consequence of this export decline is pronounced Macroeconomic Stress. The decline in exports, combined with high imports, led to India's trade deficit reaching an all-time monthly high of \$41.68 billion in October 2025.

This increase in trade deficit, a direct consequence of the shock of the US tariff, has placed considerable downward pressure on the Indian Rupee, the worst-performing currency in Asia, which is at its record low, revealing major structural weaknesses in the framework of exports across the economy.

The disproportionate tariff imposition is nothing but a move of geopolitical coercion designed to punish India for taking independent decisions regarding its energy security and defying the US diplomatic pressure. This action has undermined decades of trust, complicating multilateral efforts, such as the QUAD framework, and has led to the US being viewed as an unreliable and transactional partner in India's strategic community. The measurable economic impact—a steep decline in exports, specifically in labour-intensive sectors like textiles and gems & jewellery, ought to be mitigated. The mitigation demands a two-pronged strategy: the first will be a proactive diplomatic approach to end the politicised 50% surcharge and amend the underlying trust deficit with Washington; and the second will require a decisive strategic realignment to diversify export markets further (targeting EU, Middle East and FTAs) to provide structural relief for affected MSMEs. Additionally, implementing reforms and increasing domestic consumption would reduce dependence on a single, volatile partner. Decreasing the trade deficit must now be an integral part of the broader pursuit of strategic autonomy.

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# Justice, Health, and Equality

Our Hon'ble former Chief Justice of India, Bhushan Gavai, recently emphasized the idea of introducing a "creamy layer" concept within Scheduled Caste (SC) reservations. This discussion is, in many ways, welcome because it opens a necessary dialogue on equality and internal equity within marginalized communities. However, what is unfortunate is that this conversation seems to overlook a crucial ground reality — even today, members of SC and ST communities remain among the most vulnerable sections of society, especially women. Those speaking for or against the creamy layer have not cited comprehensive or empirical data showing whether these communities, particularly their women, have truly overcome social and economic disadvantages. I am not taking either side in this debate; my only appeal is for a data-based understanding. We must examine facts honestly — are the SC and ST communities, especially women, still facing



structural vulnerability? If yes, then why did the framers of the Constitution not include a creamy layer for SCs in the first place? The answer lies in understanding the persistent discrimination and exclusion that continues to affect these groups.

This deeper vulnerability becomes clearer when we look at issues like healthcare exploitation and the lack of protective laws. The Supreme Court's judgment in *Dr. Narendra Gupta vs. Union of India* brought to light one such grave injustice. The case exposed how private hospitals in rural areas were conducting unnecessary hysterectomies (surgical removal of the uterus) on poor, rural women to claim inflated insurance fees under government health schemes like the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY. These women were mostly young, uneducated, and from SC, ST, or OBC backgrounds. Many were in their twenties or thirties — too young for such a drastic surgery. They were manipulated by false medical advice, made to believe the surgery was essential, and their consent was neither fully informed nor voluntary.

Such acts amount to not just medical negligence but outright violation of fundamental rights. Under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, the right to health is part of the right to life. When poor women are stripped of their health, dignity,

and bodily autonomy for profit, it becomes a constitutional issue — not just a medical one.

On April 5, 2023, the Supreme Court agreed with Dr. Gupta's arguments, recognizing the seriousness of this exploitation. The Court directed the Union and State governments to immediately act by adopting the 2022 "Guidelines to Prevent Unnecessary Hysterectomies" issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. It ordered that three levels of monitoring committees — national, state, and district — be formed to keep watch on such cases, especially among women below forty. The Court made monthly reporting and quarterly auditing of all cases mandatory, stressed the importance of obtaining informed consent, and approved stringent action against hospitals indulging in unethical practices, including blacklisting.

This judgment has significance beyond reproductive rights — it reflects how weak enforcement of health laws can turn basic healthcare into exploitation. If health systems were properly regulated, with accountability and transparency, such abuses would not occur. Strengthening health-related laws is crucial not only to safeguard the right to health but to prevent vulnerable citizens, especially SC and ST women, from being treated as means for profit.

When we talk about justice or inclusion, we often forget that social empowerment and health justice cannot be separated. A healthy woman is not just a beneficiary — she is an empowered individual capable of contributing to her family, community, and the economy. That empowerment, however, is still a distant goal for many SC and ST women who face layered barriers of caste discrimination, patriarchy, and poverty.

Empowerment must therefore go beyond speeches. It should include spreading legal and health awareness in rural and tribal areas, setting up local grievance committees, and ensuring SC/ST women are represented in every monitoring mechanism. Educating women about their rights in simple language, and ensuring that health programs reach remote communities fairly, are just as important as any law drafted in Parliament.

When discussing the well-being of women, another important example is the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961. On paper, this law looks progressive — it offers paid maternity leave, job security, and childcare facilities. But its benefits reach only a tiny fraction of women working in the organized sector. In reality, over ninety percent of Indian working women are employed in the unorganised sector — as agricultural



workers, domestic helpers, street vendors, and self-employed artisans. These women rarely have legal contracts or steady employers, and thus, the protections offered by the Maternity Benefit Act often do not apply to them. Without expanding such social security laws to include informal workers, the majority of Indian women remain unprotected during the most sensitive phases of their lives.

The case filed by Dr. Narendra Gupta should remind us that legal justice and social justice must travel together. It also makes us reconsider debates like the “creamy layer” argument in SC reservations. Before we talk about excluding sections within marginalized groups, we must ask whether the ground realities have truly changed. If even educated SC/ST women continue to face healthcare exploitation, wage inequality, and caste bias, the idea of applying a creamy layer within SC reservations becomes premature.

The framers of the Constitution did not

include a creamy layer for SCs because they recognized that caste-based discrimination is not purely economic — it is social and structural. Economic prosperity may help, but it does not erase the prejudice and exclusion that marginalized communities face daily.

Therefore, while debates on reservation and internal reform are healthy, they must rest on solid evidence. Until empirical data and experience prove that SC and ST women enjoy equal respect, safety, and dignity in every sphere — from healthcare to employment — the focus should remain on protection, empowerment, and enforcement of justice.

A society is truly developed only when its most vulnerable citizens feel safe and valued. Strengthening health laws, ensuring social equality, and protecting marginalized women are not separate goals — they are all parts of the same promise of justice under the Indian Constitution.

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## 2 in 3 Rescued Bonded Workers Are Dalits, Most Receive No Compensation: National Survey

A national study by the National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labour (NCCEBL) shows that bonded labour in India continues to affect the most marginalised communities. The survey covered 950 rescued bonded workers and additional field research across 19 states. All workers surveyed were from oppressed caste groups: 63% were from Scheduled Castes, 13% from Scheduled Tribes, and 24% from Other Backward Classes. No one belonged to the general category.



The report highlights serious gaps in rehabilitation. Nearly two-thirds of workers rescued after 2016 did not receive the mandatory travel assistance. More than half of all rescued children and one-third of rescued women received no compensation, despite being entitled to ₹2 lakh. No rescued man received the ₹1 lakh compensation due to them, and only one woman received between ₹1 lakh and ₹2 lakh. Under the Central Sector Scheme, higher compensation is set aside for transgender persons, persons with disabilities, survivors of sexual exploitation, and

## others in extreme situations, but the CJI Gavai Backs ‘Creamy Layer’ Cut in SC Quota

Outgoing Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai, the first Buddhist and only the second Dalit to lead the judiciary, concluded his tenure with strong views on reservation policy and judicial independence. He firmly advocated the exclusion of the “creamy layer” from Scheduled Caste quotas, stressing that affirmative action must benefit the most disadvantaged rather than affluent families who continue to enjoy quota advantages. Gavai reminded that the Supreme Court has already permitted sub-classification within SC/ST communities, urging states to identify advanced groups—such as children of senior officials—and exclude them to ensure fairness.

Despite criticism from sections of his own community, he maintained that such measures are vital for achieving genuine equality. On judicial appointments, Gavai defended the collegium system, calling it a safeguard for judicial independence. He expressed regret that no women judges could be elevated to the Supreme Court during his tenure due to lack of consensus, though his collegium recommended several for high courts. Retiring with satisfaction, he emphasized that reservations must continue to serve those who remain socially and educationally backward.

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# DIN VISHESH

## Remembering Sant Gadge Baba

**20th December**  
**Sant Gadge Baba Death Anniversary**

Sant Gadge Baba, born Debuji Zhingraji Janorkar on February 23, 1876, in Shendgaon village of present-day Amravati district, Maharashtra, was a revered saint, social reformer, and wandering preacher who dedicated his life to cleanliness, education, and upliftment of the downtrodden.

Coming from a poor Dhobi (washerman) family, he had almost no formal education yet possessed extraordinary wisdom and compassion. He left home early, renounced material life, and began travelling across Maharashtra and Vidarbha with his trademark earthen pot (gadga) and broom, earning the name "Gadge Baba." His simple attire, powerful kirtans, and direct, hard-hitting speeches exposed superstition, caste discrimination, untouchability, and social evils like alcoholism and dowry.

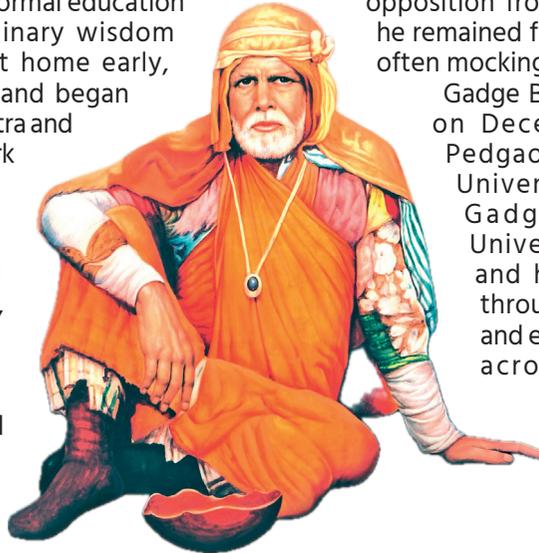
Gadge Baba's most distinctive mission was

public hygiene and sanitation. Long before Swachh Bharat, he personally swept village streets, cleaned choked gutters and ponds, and urged people to maintain cleanliness as a religious duty. He famously said, "If you don't keep your village clean, God will not live there." He built over 31 dharmashalas, schools, hostels, animal shelters (panjarapoles), and hospitals using donations collected during his kirtans, refusing any money for himself.

He fiercely opposed idol worship and ritualism, emphasizing devotion through service to humanity. His teachings blended the Bhakti tradition of Sant Tukaram and Kabir with practical social reform. Despite opposition from orthodox sections, he remained fearless and humorous, often mocking blind traditions.

Gadge Baba attained samadhi on December 20, 1956, at Pedgaon. Today, Amravati University is named Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University in his honour, and his legacy continues through cleanliness drives and educational institutions across Maharashtra. A

true people's saint, he proved that spirituality and social service are inseparable.



**25th December**  
Madan Mohan Malaviya  
Birth Anniversary



**2nd January**  
Vitthal Ramji Shinde  
Death Anniversary



**3rd January**  
Savitribai Phule  
Birth Anniversary



**12th January**  
Swami Vivekananda  
Birth Anniversary

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