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Article

Empowering India's Scheduled Castes: Challenges, Reservations, and Pathways to Progress"

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Abstract: This paper examines the condition of the Scheduled Castes in India and recognizes the factors that are causing dismal performance of the Scheduled Castes despite reservation policies. The paper first discusses the condition of Scheduled Castes based on the parameters of social, economic, education, and political representation. It then provides a brief overview of the current reservation percentages allocated to Scheduled Castes in various sectors. Moreover, the paper explores the causes for the dismal performance of Scheduled Castes despite the existence of reservation policies. In order to improve the condition of Scheduled Castes, the paper proposes a multifaceted approach, including the consideration of socio-economic criteria for recognizing castes in the list of Scheduled Castes, dis reservation of affluent Scheduled Caste families, preferential appointment of Scheduled Castes in administrative positions within Scheduled Areas, and reforms within the National Commission for Scheduled Castes. The paper also emphasizes the importance of periodic evaluations of socioeconomic conditions, talent identification, and grassroots awareness campaigns as strategies to uplift the Scheduled Castes.

Keywords: Scheduled Castes; Caste system; reservation; social injustice; untouchability

Introduction

India's long and sustained civilizations across the ages make it a unique society. India is diverse in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, language, and so on. This diversity presents both challenges and opportunities. India has been the land of immigrants and invaders from across the world, resulting in an infusion of diverse cultures into this land, which can be traced during the colonial period; Initially, the British administrators began by trying to understand the complexities of castes to learn how to govern the country efficiently. Therefore, many British administrative officials have taken a great interest in pursuing such surveys. The census in 1871 helped them a lot, and after that, the census was held regularly every 10 years from 1881. British started some welfare schemes for depressed class then the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed which gave legal recognition to the lists or 'schedules' of Castes and tribes marked out for special treatment by the state. This is how the term 'Scheduled Castes' came into being. The so-called untouchable castes were included among the Scheduled Castes in the second-round table conference Dr BR. Ambedkar demanded a separate electorate for depressed classes; however, due to differences with Gandhi, the demand was refused by Dr.BR. Ambedkar then Poona Pact was signed in 1932, and 147 seats were reserved for depressed classes in the legislature representation was also given in public services, and a significant portion of educational grants were given for their upliftment.

After independence The Constitution of India itself mentioned the welfare of the Scheduled Castes of the country under article 341 to 342 of the constitution that The President after consulting with The Governor of the state has the power to recognize any Castes as Scheduled Castes This recognition is based on the social, educational, and economic backwardness these communities face, once a Castes has been added in the list of Scheduled Castes the people belonging to that Castes will get reservation benefits in educational institution, government jobs and legislative bodies additionally (Finology, n.d.) under Article 17 of Indian constitution mentioned about the abolition of untouchability as a fundamental right which can be enforceable in the constitution if violated, Article 46 requires the State 'to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the

weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Both central and state governments had announced various schemes and policies for the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes in the country and to improve their social and economic conditions like Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Coaching scheme for banking/secretarial services, Military training for SC/ST/OBCs

However, despite constitutional safeguards and various welfare schemes, Scheduled Castes have to suffer in both the social and economic sectors.

Objectives of the Study

The article critically sets following objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic condition of the Scheduled castes
2. To get to know about the reasons causing dismal performance of Scheduled castes
3. Methods to empower the Scheduled castes

Analysis on The Reservation for Scheduled Castes

To empower the Scheduled Castes in the country and to ensure the participation of Scheduled Castes in educational sector as well as in decision making Scheduled Castes (SC) are given 15% quota in jobs/higher educational institutions further this percentage is also considered to reserve seats in the elections of The Parliaments and The State Legislatures, firstly Sc's women will be given priority for reservation benefit and after that Sc's men will considered it is to be noted the percentage of reservation is not uniform all over the country it varies from state to state the highest reservation is given by Punjab of 29% and the lowest is given by Goa of 2% (Reservation in India, n.d.) ,

Percentages of reservation for each state

State/UT	Reservation Percentage
Andhra Pradesh	15
Assam	7
Bihar	15
Chhattisgarh	13
Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	3
Delhi	15
Goa	2
Gujarat	7
Haryana	20
Himachal Pradesh	25
Jharkhand	10
Karnataka	15
Kerala	8
Madhya Pradesh	16
Maharashtra	13
Manipur	3
Odisha	16

Puducherry	16
Punjab	29
Rajasthan	16
Sikkim	7
Tamil Nadu	18
Telangana	15
Tripura	17
Uttar Pradesh	21
Uttarakhand	19
West Bengal	22

Socio-Economic Status

Post Independence the poverty rate among Scheduled Castes has been increasing according to UN report in India, 5 out of 6 multidimensionally poor are from lower tribes or Castes the poverty rate among Sc’s is 33.3 % (In India, 5 out of 6 multidimensionally poor are from, 2021), majority of the poor people belonging to Scheduled Castes category are from rural areas where there is lack of infrastructure like industries for work and schools/colleges for education this has increased a gap among the Sc’s of rural and Sc’s of urban areas it can be said, that in 2011-12 the poverty rate of Sc’s in rural area was 31.5% and in urban areas it is just 21.7%, this has increased income inequality among the Sc’s of rural and urban areas further Sc’s owned food related industries have a disproportionately lower Share in India as compare to any other Castes it is mainly due to untouchability mindset which is prevalent in rural areas despite of abolition of untouchability mentioned in the list of fundamental rights in constitution and SCs have the lowest relative share among self-employed workers according to NCRB report, atrocities/Crime against Scheduled Castes have increased by 1.2% in 2021 (50,900) over 2020 (50,291 cases). (Team, 2023)In conclusion the socio-economic condition of the Scheduled Castes has not been improved on a large scale they faces discrimination at different levels.

Educational Attainment

Historically the Scheduled Castes were denied access to learning due to their so-called polluted and lowest status in the Castes system in India, they also faces discrimination in educational institution which affected their mental health, there is huge difference between the literacy rate between the Scheduled Castes and upper Castes in the country as per the 2011 census the literacy rate in India is 72.99% whereas for Scheduled Castes it is just 66.1%, Bihar has the lowest literacy rate of 48.6% (Jagaran Josh, n.d.) the literacy rate among the women belonging to Scheduled Castes is 57% according to 2011 census (Literacy rates in the female scheduled caste population and total population in India between 1961 and 2011, n.d.) it is mainly due to girls are engaged in household and they are not able to focus on studies further they are expected to do household work by their families instead of study though The government has provided reservation in both government and private educational institutions to Scheduled Castes but despite of this between 2016-2020 only 9 per cent candidates admitted to the PhD programmes were from the SC category (SC, ST, OBC representation in Indian education is dismal, upper-caste nexus persists, 2021) further it is not difficult to found the discriminatory attitude of teacher towards students belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Sc’s students are forced to sit back in the class and they are also forbidden to share their lunch with other students this is mainly due to existence of untouchability in low visibility areas in the country due to Castes discrimination a student belonging to Scheduled Castes category of IIT Bombay(a prestigious institute) has committed suicide due to Castes discrimination on the campus. (Caste In Campus, n.d.)

Political Representation of Scheduled Castes

To empower and improve the condition of Scheduled Castes in the country, there is a need to increase their political representation and include them in the nation. The decision-making process

will result in a boost in their self-confidence, and they can formulate effective policies for their welfare as per their issues and problems. As per the order issued by the Delimitation Commission in 2008, 84 seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes in the lower house of The Parliament (Ministry of External Affairs, n.d.). The history of reservation for Scheduled Castes in national politics can be traced to colonial times when Dr Ambedkar wanted a separate electorate for depressed classes, but due to differences with Gandhi, separate electorate demand was refused by Ambedkar on some conditions, which were to increase the percentage of reservation in council for depressed classes after attaining independence. The constitution of India adopted a democratic form of government that provided reservations for Scheduled Castes. Further reservation quotas have also been extended in state-level politics, where seats are reserved in the state legislative assembly depending on the percentage of the Scheduled Castes population in the state, as mentioned in Article 332 of The Constitution of India.

Causes for Dismal Performance of Scheduled Castes despite of reservation

Though many welfare schemes was introduced by the both central and state governments but the basic aim of the policy can be fulfilled only after the effective implementation of the schemes/policies, the implementation process of the policy has been hindered because of corruption in government departments, second cause is that, though constitution of India mentioned about right to equality but despite of this the Scheduled Castes faces discrimination in low visibility area like rural areas this is because of the absence of good governance in these areas and the administrators are not able to provide better to the Scheduled Castes, Sc's also faces denial of justice due to unfamiliarity with laws and judicial process, the third cause is that the financial inclusion process has not benefitted the Scheduled Castes as financial inclusion helps in direct benefit transfer but as majority of the Scheduled Castes are excluded from the banking system it is very difficult for government to provide subsidies to the Scheduled Castes effectively to improve their condition further because of absence of banking literacy Scheduled Castes and not able to get loans from banks and other formal institutions which forces them to borrow money from moneylenders and landlords which result in that they fall into poverty trap, the fourth cause for dismal performance of Scheduled Castes is language barrier and in educational institution the courses are mainly offered in English and the people belonging to Scheduled Castes are not able to get familiar with it, as the 8th schedule of the constitution itself mentioned more than 22 languages but only Hindi and English is used in most of the places, the fifth cause for the poor performance of the Scheduled Castes is that though the constitution provides for the reservation in educational institution for Sc's but there is absence of the educational institution itself in the places where the majority population of Scheduled Castes resides which is in rural areas. Further, the people belonging to Scheduled Castes are not aware of whether their Castes are included in the list or Scheduled Castes or not; they are also not able to get their Caste certificates issued from the government departments because of the bribery asked from them to issue certificates by the government official. further Due to benefits provided to Scheduled Castes, people belonging to high or forward Castes now want to become 'backward', Demands and agitation in recent times of agriculture dominant Castes like Patels, Kapurs, Jats and now Marathas demanding quota for themselves and reforms in reservation policy of India, this has increased the Castes tensions in the country.

In the latest judgement of The Supreme Court, it has been said that the person belonging to Scheduled Castes in one state cannot claim reservation benefits in education, employment, and other sectors in any other state, which has contributed significantly to reducing the scope of benefit from reservation as a person recognized as Scheduled Castes in one state where there is lack of educational facilities is not able to get reservation benefits in states where better educational institutions are present (SC/ST of one state can't claim job, education, land benefits .., 2022)

Methods to Improve the Condition of Scheduled Castes in Country

Currently, the recognition of scheduled castes is mainly done on the basis of the caste instead of solely deciding on a single basis; it should include some social and economic criteria, and there is a need to analyse the socio-economic condition of a particular caste and then only it should be added to the list of scheduled castes to benefit from reservation and other welfare schemes.

Dis-reservation should be done by some scheduled castes who belong to families of public officials of a certain rank — IAS, IPS, other Central and State civil services, present or former MLAs,

MPs, other senior politicians — certain high-income professionals such as physicians, chartered accountants, managers above a certain rank in the private sector, and businessmen and others above a certain income, it will help to reduce inequality between the scheduled castes people as the really needed scheduled castes will get benefit of reservation; it will also reduce the competition among scheduled castes to get better educational and government job facilities.

In the Scheduled areas there is need to prefer, that posts of IAS, IPS and other important positions should held by the Scheduled caste person as he/she will be better able to understand the issues of the Scheduled castes further people will also not hesitate to address their grievances and they are comfortable because the administrator belongs to their caste category, by this approach we will get double win first is to provide good governance in the scheduled areas second is that we are posting the person belonging to Scheduled castes on high position in the administration this will encourage other people also to work hard so as to become part of administration

There is a need to reform the National Commission of Schedule Castes as the recommendations of the commission are not binding on the government, so sometimes the government totally ignores the commission's report. The recommendation of the commission should make further binding to the government. Scheduled castes are not aware that the commission functioning there is a need to spread awareness among scheduled castes that they can approach the National Commission of Schedule Caste if their rights are infringed for this helpline number can be started as we have for women in the police department, which will empower the scheduled castes to report for any atrocities against them.

Periodic evaluation of social and economic condition of the scheduled castes should be done and it is required that if any caste has not shown improvement in its socio economic criteria despite of reservation and other welfare schemes then some special steps to be taken for empowerment of that caste secondly, if any caste has been improved in its socio economic condition and is found that the caste can maintain its progress without reservation then these castes should be dis-reserved so that the really needed people can get benefit of reservation

There is need to identify talent among the boys and girls belonging to Scheduled caste category and then provide free training to them in special talent schools in their relevant interest it will help them to compete with the rest of the society in equal manner

The use of panchayat-level officials to spread awareness among the scheduled castes regarding the various welfare schemes launched by the government should be given responsibility by central and state governments to ensure the participation of the scheduled castes in the country development process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, India's diverse society with different castes of people living together, where scheduled castes are the most backward and deprived section in society, while the nation has recognized historical injustices faced by the scheduled castes and requires many steps to improve their condition. However, many challenges still exist, such as discrimination, lack of educational opportunities, and economic disparities that hindered the progress of scheduled castes, although reservation policies contributed to improving the condition of the scheduled castes, but the impact is minimal. There is a need to make the reservation system effective and to empower them with a multi-faceted approach, such as focusing on the effective implementation of policies, financial inclusion, educational reform, political representation, periodic evaluation, and dis reservation for those who have progressed sufficiently so that the benefits reach those who need them most. India should comprehensively address these challenges to harness the full potential of its citizens.

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