Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
(An Open Access International Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN: 2945-3968

Research Article

Constitutional Provisions and Welfare Policies for the upliftment of Scheduled Castes

Dr. Neelam
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science
Hindu Girls College, Sonipat-131001, Haryana-India

Abstract: The Indian Constitution, through its progressive provisions, aims to ensure social justice and equality for historically marginalized communities, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs). This paper examines the constitutional safeguards, affirmative action policies, and welfare schemes designed for the upliftment of Scheduled Castes. It evaluates the effectiveness of these measures in addressing socio-economic disparities and suggests reforms for better implementation. Despite constitutional safeguards and progressive laws, crimes and human rights violations against Scheduled Castes remain pervasive in India. Despite all the welfare schemes and policies to ensure social equality, there is hardly any impact on the mindset of upper castes. There is emerging need to take suitable preventive measures to curb these abuses, violations and crimes against SCs.
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Keywords: Scheduled caste, Constitutional Provisions, Reservation Policy, Welfare Schemes.

How to cite this article: Neelam, Constitutional Provisions and Welfare Policies for the upliftment of Scheduled Castes. Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences. 2021 Feb 20;1(1): 54-64

Source of support: Nil.
Conflict of interest: None

Introduction

Historically, however, it is believed that the caste system began with the arrival of the Aryans in India around 1500 BC.[1]The caste system is a classification of people into four castes called varnas, where 'Brahmans'(usually priests, teachers,or scholars), are at the top, then the 'Kshatriyas' (warriors, political rulers or soldiers, followed by the 'Vaishyas' (traders, merchants or moneylenders), and the fourth are the 'Shudras', who are usually labourers, peasants, artisans, or servants.[2]The varnas are again divided into specialized sub-castes called Jatis. Each Jati is composed of a group who are involved in a specific occupation.It is unfortunate that although the original intent of Varnas was not to create caste, but it has evolved into caste system gradually.

With the passage of time, the Shudras split into two tiers. Those who were engaged in the most menial and dirty jobs being called the'Ati-Shudras'. The Ati-Shudras were considered untouchable.They performed occupations that are considered unclean and polluting. They were not included in the ranked castes.[3]Since they were rated outside the caste system, they were forced to stay in the outskirts of the village and were never an integral part of village and render services to the upper castes.Most of them live on the edge of poverty, barely able to feed their families. They were forbidden to enter temples, to draw water from public wells or to wear shoes in presence of people of higher caste. They were made to dig the graves, dispose of dead animals, clean human waste with their bare hands, all because due to their caste status. They were deemed polluting and therefore, "untouchable".These people are known by different names. Mahatma Gandhi called them '*Harijan'*, the children of God.Religious books of the Hindus called them '*Sudras*'; Ambedkar called them '*Dalits*' i.e., depressed classes. Dalit is a Marathi word first used by Mahatma Jotiba Phule, a social reformer who led a movement for the upliftment of untouchables.[4]The Government of India officially calls them '*Scheduled Castes*'.

Received: **05-01-2021**
Revised: **12-01-2021**
Accepted: **15-02-2021**
Published: **20-02-2021**

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Corresponding neelambalraj@gmail.com

In the middle of 19thcentury, an anti-caste movement was initiated by Jyotirao Phule, who advocated for the education and the upliftment of women, Shudra's, and Dalits. He also stressed upon abolishing the untouchability.B.R. Ambedkar campaigned for greater rights for Dalits in British India, and even after independence. Both Ambedkar and Gandhi worked for the abolishment of the caste system.

In the 1960s, the reservation system for SCs and STs began to ensure their political representation. Three major categories i.e., Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) were identified which will be eligible for preferential policies.

What is the Scheduled Caste?

Scheduled Castes (SCs) are among the most underprivileged socio-economic groups in India.They suffer from extreme social, educational, and economic backwardness arising out of age-old practice of untouchability.[5]The term, 'Scheduled Caste' was first incorporated into the Government of India Act of 1935 and a schedule was added to incorporate a list of various weaker sections of the society. The idea behind classification of castes as Scheduled Castes is to safeguard the interest of those who are victims of caste discrimination and to give them special rights so they may joinhand with the rest of the population in the process of development.

The term 'Scheduled Caste' is a constitutional and not a sociological concept.Scheduled means these castes are on a government schedule that entitles them to certain protections and affirmative action.The Constitution of India, through Article 341, authorizes the President of India to specify castes to be notified as SC's.[6]The people from Scheduled Castes are also referred as Dalit, which means "*downtrodden*". This term was popularized by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Dalits are persons who are socially excluded in India. Theysuffer social and physical isolation from the rest of the population because they are poor, backward in education and occupy a low position in Hindu social structure.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature survey reveals that people of Scheduled Castes were deprived of equivalent status & rights like other castes in India. The Dalits have usually been poor, deprived of basic human rights and treated as social inferiors in India. They still face economic, social, cultural, and political discrimination in the name of caste. They are socially, economically, politically, religiously, and culturally oppressed.[7]

Every day we read news that Dalits are being beaten, unlawfully detained, tortured, raped, killed and their homes being burned in caste violence. The crimes against Scheduled Castes remain under-researched.Literature surveyreveals that despite over sixty years of implementation of various laws and measures, atrocities against Dalits are continuously rising.[8-10]

Discrimination against Dalits is also political in nature. Often their right to vote is taken away through violent means. In a review, S. Saikia highlighted that how state failed in its duty to eliminate caste discrimination.[11]Status reporton Atrocities on Dalits in Rajasthan under SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act 2015 also revealed that Government machinery, law enforcement agencies and judiciary all have failed to provide protection to the Dalit communities.[12] The legislations and acts are not implemented in true spirit.

Vengateshwaran and Velusamy studied that Dalits are constant victims to atrocities, violence, discrimination, and exclusion.[13] Authors examined atrocities against scheduled castes from 2001 to 2015 and found that crime incidence is gradually increasing every year.

Corresponding Author: neelambalraj@gmail.com

J. Singh and G. Vashishtha studied the status of Dalit women in India and found that they are still facing the discrimination in all spheres.[14]A. Seilanobserved thatsocial exclusion is the denial of equal opportunities.[15] Dalits in rural India are employed in agricultural and non-agricultural labour activities in the rural sector. They are still poor and facing discrimination.

Over the past decade, India has witnessed both an increase in the reporting of crimes against SCs and enhanced legal frameworks to address them. However, the persistence of deep-seated social attitudes, inadequate implementation, and judicial delays continue to undermine progress. A multi-pronged strategy involving legal, social, educational, and economic dimensions is essential for ensuring the safety and dignity of SCs across India.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Every day, numerous incidents of crime against SCs are being reported in newspapers, social media, and other print media. Though, numerous commissions have also been set up by the central as well as state governments and a huge number of non-government organizations (NGOs) are working to stop such violations, yet such violations are neither abated nor stopped. This manuscript is aimed to examine various rights imparted to SCsand welfare policies framed for the upliftment of SCs in India. It seeks to raise awareness and provide insight into the issues that the deprived class has faced over time

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The required information on constitutional provisions and welfare schemes forSCs are collected from different secondary sources. The population data of SCs were collected from web portal of Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Statistical data of crimes against SCs have been gathered from National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The analysis and discussion of this research is made on the basis of the collected information. This manuscript ensures a comprehensive, data-driven study of crimes against SCs in India, combining statistical rigor with socio-legal insights. It will be helpful to researchers as well as administrative bodies to suggest and formulate policies and to take suitable preventive measures to curb these abuses, violations and crimes against SCs.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN INDIA

The Socio-economic Status of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India has seen some progress over the years, but significant disparities persist due to historical discrimination, caste-based exclusion, and limited access to resources. Here's an overview of their socio-economic conditions:

1) Education

The literacy rate among SCs has improved but remains below the national average. As per the 2011 Census, the SC literacy rate was 66.1% compared to 73% for the general population. The school enrolment has increased due to government schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Mid-Day Meal Scheme, but dropout rates remain high, especially at the secondary level. The representation in premier institutions has also improved due to reservation policies, but challenges like discrimination and lack of mentorship persist.

2) Economic Status

A large proportion of SCs remain engaged in manual labour, sanitation work, and agriculture. Though they are benefitted from reservation, yet the representation in higher administrative positions is still low. There is limited employment of SCs in the

private sectordue to caste bias and lack of social networks.SCs face difficulties accessing credit and markets. Schemes like Stand-Up India aim to promote SC/ST entrepreneurship.

The poverty rate of SCs is higher than the national average. As per NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index (2023), SCs have a higher deprivation rate in nutrition, sanitation, and housing.The land ownership of SCs is less. Only 10% of SCs own agricultural land, making them economically vulnerable.SC workers often earn lower wages compared to upper-caste workers for the same work.

3) Health & Living Conditions

Malnutrition &infant mortality is higher among SCs due to poverty and lack of healthcare access.Many of them lack proper toilets, and manual scavenging remains a critical issue despite being outlawed.A significant proportion live in kutcha houses or segregated settlements.

4) Social Status

The deprived class frequently face caste-based atrocities. Despite laws like the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, crimes against SCs including lynching, rape, and social boycott continue.Untouchability is still practiced in rural areas, restricting access to temples, water sources, and social events. There is meagre political representation. While reserved seats in legislatures ensure some representation, dominant castes often influence SC leaders.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR SCHEDULED CASTES IN INDIA

The Constitution of India has provided protection and safeguards for the people of Scheduled Castes (SCs) with the aim of promoting their educational and economic status and eliminating social disabilities. It guarantees the equality of status and opportunity to all citizens of the nation. It prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste, or sex, etc. Even though India's ancient caste system was abolished legally, it is still entrenched socially and politically. Some of the major constitutional provisions related to Scheduled Castes (SCs) are as under:

1) **Article 15** of the Indian Constitution emphasizes that no citizen shall be subjected to any disability or restriction on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
2) **Article 15 (4)** empowers the State to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward class and for SCs and STs. This provision has enabled the State to reserve seats for SCs and STs in educational institutions.
3) **Article 16 (4A)** offers reservation in matters of promotion to any class or classes of posts in the services under the State in favour of SCs/STs, which are not adequately represented in the services under the State.
4) **Article 17** abolishes Untouchabilityand its practice in any form hasbeen strictly forbidden.Later, the Parliament enacted Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 to give effect to Article 17. Further, this act was made more stringent by making amendment in 1976 and was renamed as the Protection of Civil RightsAct, 1955 along with some provisions of theIndian Penal Code.
5) **Article 23** prohibits traffic in human beings and beggar and other similar forms of forced labour. It does not specifically mention SCs or STs but since majority of bonded labour belong to these sections, this article has special significance for them.
6) **Article 46**implies the State shall promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people particularly Scheduled Castes and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
7) **Article 330** of the Constitution provides for reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People. In pursuance of this article, out of 545 seats in the Lok Sabha, 79 seats are reserved for SCs.

Corresponding Author: neelambalraj@gmail.com

8) **Article 332** provides reservation of seats forthe Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the legislative assemblies of the States.
9) **Article 335** provides that the rights of the people of the Scheduled Castes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State.
10) **Article 338** provides for a National Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with duties to investigate and monitor all matters relating to safeguards provided for them, to inquire into specific complaints and to participate and advise on the planning process of their socio-economic development etc.
11) **Article 243 D** came intoexistence by 73rd amendment act, 1992 which ensures seats in Panchayats and Zila Parishads for SCs and STs. Out of seats reserved for SCs and STs, one third seats shall be allotted to women.

WELFARE POLICIES FOR SCHEDULED CASTES

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment is the nodal Ministry to supervise the interests of the Scheduled Castes. The Scheduled Castes Development (SCD) Bureau of the Ministry aims to promote the welfare of Scheduled Castes through their educational, economic, and social empowerment.

A) **Educational Empowerment**

Ministry provides various scholarships to the students of Scheduled Castes to ensure that education is not denied to them due to their poor financial conditions. A few such scholarships are:

a) Pre-Matric Scholarships
This scholarship is intended to reduce the rate of drop out from the school. This is centrally sponsored scheme with 100 % central assistance.
b) Post-Matric Scholarships
This is also 100% central funded scheme for the educational empowerment of scheduled caste students.

B) **Economic Empowerment**

Several schemes have been launched for economic upliftment of people of Scheduled Castes, such as:

a) National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) was set up for providing loans, skill training to people below double poverty line.
b) National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) provides credit facilities to Safai Karamcharis, scavengers, and their dependants.
c) Special Central Assistance to Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCSP) provides 100% assistance to enable people to cross the poverty line.
d) Scheme of Assistance to Scheduled Castes Development (SCDCs) is a poverty alleviation program. It identifies eligible SC families and provides financial support in the form of margin money at a low rate of interest and provide subsidy to reduce repayment liabilities.
e) Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes promote entrepreneurship amongst the Scheduled Castes who are oriented towards innovation and growth technologies and to provide concessional finance.
f) Credit Enhancement Guarantee Schemes for Scheduled castesalso aim to provide credit guarantee facility to Young and start-up entrepreneurs, belonging to Scheduled Castes

C) **Social Empowerment**

Various acts came into existence time to time to uphold the constitutional mandate and safeguard the interests of SCs & STs. The major legal enactments at the national level are:

a) **The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955**

This act provides punishment for the practice of untouchability.The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 was enacted as the extension of Article 17 of the constitution to abolish untouchability. The SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 was implemented from 30th January 1990 to check and discourage crimes against SCs/STs by persons belonging to other communities. Special Courts have also been instituted in various states for the speedy trial of cases registered exclusively under these Acts.

b) **The Bonded Labour System (Abolition)Act, 1976**

This act provides for the abolition of bonded labour system with a view to preventing the economic and physical exploitation of the weaker sections of the society.

c) **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 1989**

It provides financial assistance to States and UTs to provide relief to atrocity victims, incentives for inter-caste marriage, awareness generation etc. This act was later amended in June 2014.

d) **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (MS Act, 2013) was legislated to eradicate dry latrine and manual scavenging and rehabilitation of scavengers.**

OTHER WELFARE SCHEMES

a) **Pardhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojna (PMAGY)**

This scheme was implemented for integrated development of Scheduled Castes.

b) **Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhattrawas Yojna**

This scheme provides expenses for hostel facilities for the students of Scheduled Castes.

c) **Upgradation of Merit of SC Students**

This scheme provides remedial coaching for the students of Scheduled Castes to prepare students for competitive examinations for entry into professional courses.

d) **Dr. Ambedkar Foundation**

It was set up in 1992 under the aegis of the Ministry of Welfare, Government of India to promote Dr. Ambedkar's ideology and philosophy.

e) **Babu Jagjivan Ram National Foundation**

This foundation propagates the ideals of the late Babu Jagjivan Ram, on social reform as well as his ideology, philosophy of life, mission, and vision to create a casteless and classless society.

Further, in order to regulate, monitor and implement various schemes for the welfare of Scheduled Castes, a national commission for scheduled castes was being established by the central government.

National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)

Article 338 of the constitution provided for the appointment of a special officer for scheduled castes to investigate all matter relating to their constitutional safeguards. In 1978, the government (through a resolution) set up a non-statutory multi-member commission for SCs and STs. Later, the 65th constitutional amendment act of 1990

Corresponding Author: neelambalraj@gmail.com

provided for the establishment of a national commission for SCs and STs. Again, the 89th constitutional amendment act of 2003 bifurcated the commission for SCs and STs into two separate bodies, namely, national commission for scheduled castes (under article 338) and the national commission for scheduled tribes (under article 338A).

Crimes against SCs under SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act

The Scheduled Castes comprise about 16.6% of India's population in the 2011 Census. The mid-year population of Scheduled Castes in India was 2013.78 lacs in 2011 Census, which increased to 2220.22 lacs in 2020. The crime incidence against Scheduled Castes was 33719 in India. The NCRB data reveals that crime incidence almost doubled from year 2011 to year 2020. The crime rate increased from 16.74 in the year 2011 to 22.62 in the year 2020.

Table 1. Total Crimes against SCs under SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act only

Year	Mid-Year SC Population (lacs)*	Crime Incidence	Crime Rate
2011	2013.78	11342	5.63
2012	2036.72	12576	6.17
2013	2059.66	13975	6.79
2014	2082.60	40300	19.35
2015	2105.54	40129	19.06
2016	2128.48	40774	19.16
2017	2151.42	42969	19.97
2018	2174.36	42539	19.56
2019	2197.30	45922	20.90
2020	2220.20	50268	22.64

Key Causes of Crime against Scheduled Castes

In spite of the stringent laws, crimes and human rights violations against SCs are still widespread. Understanding the root causes of these crimes is essential to formulate effective policies for prevention and justice.The major causes of crime against Scheduled Castes are:

1) **Weak Implementation of Laws**

   The unnecessary delay in justice, officials refusing to register cases, huge number of pending cases, poor conviction rate, lack of comprehensive witness protection mechanism, loopholes in judiciary, lack of free legal aid, and dominance of higher castes are some of the major barriers to justice. Further, persons of dominant castes also interfere with the justice process using their economic, social and political powers to threaten, intimidate and coerce the victims asking them to stay silent or refrain from judicial approach. Police is also sometimes insensitive and even refuse to file FIR in many of the cases of violence or atrocities against the Dalits. Even if the case is registered, the police fail to

Corresponding Author: neelambalraj@gmail.com

investigate it in an impartial manner. There are reports that police officials routinely demand bribes, intimidate witnesses, cover up evidence, and beat up the person of weaker sections.

2) **Education & Awareness Gaps**
   Many SCs are unaware of their rights under the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and POA Act, 1989. Further, discrimination in education leads to dropouts, limiting economic mobility and perpetuating vulnerability.
3) **Deep-Rooted Caste Discrimination**
   The caste system has perpetuated the idea of untouchability and social hierarchy, leading to systemic violence against SCs. Many upper caste communities still consider SCs as inferior, leading to exclusion, humiliation, and violent enforcement of caste norms. People of Scheduled Castes live in fear and face discrimination at almost all the levels. Victims have to make compromises under pressure.
4) **Political, Social and Economic Imbalance**
   Local power structures are often controlled by dominant castes, leading to police inaction and biased justice systems. When SCs assert their rights (education, jobs, political representation), dominant castes use violence to suppress them. Many SCs work as landless labourers under dominant castes, leading to exploitation and violent reprisals if they demand fair wages. SCs, particularly in rural areas, are disproportionately engaged in low-wage, hazardous occupations.
5) **Poverty and illiteracy**
   Poverty forces SCs into exploitative labour conditions, making them vulnerable to physical abuse if they resist, while lack of education prevents them from seeking justice.Low literacy rates prevent SCs from understanding their rights

RECOMMENDATIONS

While affirmative action and welfare schemes have improved the socio-economic status of SCs over decades, deep-rooted caste discrimination, economic inequality, and inadequate implementation of policies remain major hurdles. Education, land reforms, stricter enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, and better access to capital are critical for further progress.The major recommendations for the improvement of police, medical system, legal aid and judicial system so as to improve the status of Scheduled Castes are as follows:

1) **The human rights institutions should be granted special powers to establish an independent complaints and monitoring mechanism to deal with discrimination, violence or atrocities against Schedules Castes.**
2) **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1995 must be effectively enforced.**
3) **Police must be held moreanswerable to protect victims and witnesses.**
4) **Judicial system must actin a more generous and accountablemanner in dealing with cases of human right violations against Schedules Castes.**
5) **Law enforcement agencies must be sensitized to address the grievances of Scheduled Castes**
6) **Though the concept of free legal aid to fight the cases of Scheduled Castes exists but it has become a mere formality.It must be reviewed and implemented in true spirit.**
7) **Ensure proportionate representation of persons of Schedules Castes in local governance.**

Corresponding Author: neelambalraj@gmail.com

8) **State level Commission for Scheduled Castes must play more responsible role in identifying the causes for violations and take remedial action accordingly.**

CONCLUSIONS

India's Constitution provides a strong framework for the upliftment of deprived classes through reservations, anti-discrimination laws, and welfare schemes. However, deep-rooted caste biases, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and lack of awareness hinder progress. A multi-pronged approach combining legal, economic, and social reforms is essential for achieving true social justice.The persons of Scheduled Castes are the more vulnerable to discrimination, assault, murder, rape and sexual harassment. Although the incidence of such crimes is generally treated as a law & order problem but more broadly it is a matter of social justice. There is ample evidence that suggests that upper castes use and justify various forms of violence as tools to ensure adherence to caste-based norms and traditions by the lower castes.

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Corresponding Author: neelambalraj@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: neelambalraj@gmail.com

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