



## Advancing SC/ST Welfare in India

**For Prelims:** [SCs](#), [STs](#), [Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes \(Prevention of Atrocities\) Act, 1989](#), [Article 342](#), [Article 341](#), [Article 15\(4\)](#), [Article 16\(4\)](#), [Article 46](#), [Article 340](#), [NCST](#), [Fifth Schedule](#), [Sixth Schedule](#), [Forest Rights Act, 2006](#), [NAMASTE](#), [Eklavya Model Residential Schools \(EMRS\)](#).

**For Mains:** Issues Related to SCs & STs, Government policies & interventions and way forward.

[Source: PIB](#)

### Why in News?

The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** held the **28th Coordination Committee meeting**, focused on strategies to **curb untouchability offences and atrocities** against [Scheduled Castes \(SCs\)](#) and [Scheduled Tribes \(STs\)](#).

- Key discussions revolved around the implementation of existing laws like the **Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, 1955** and the [Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes \(Prevention of Atrocities\) Act, 1989](#).

### What are SCs and STs and How are they Recognized in Indian Legal Frameworks?

- **About SCs and STs :** **Article 366** defines the term 'Scheduled Caste.'
- According to [Article 341](#), the **President**, after consulting the **Governor** of the respective State, may notify the **Scheduled Castes for that state or Union Territory (UT)**. The list can be amended by **Parliament through legislation**.
- The term "Scheduled Castes" was initially introduced in the **Government of India Act, 1935**, marking its recognition in legal and administrative frameworks.
- **STs:** [Article 366](#) defines **STs** as **tribes, tribal communities, or parts/groups** within them that are designated as such under **Article 342** of the Constitution.
  - Under [Article 342](#), the **President of India**, in **consultation with the Governor** of the concerned state, is empowered to **specify the STs** for each **state or union territory**.
- **Framework to Address Caste-Based Atrocities in India:**
  - **Fundamental Rights:** [Article 14](#), [15](#), [16](#) and [17](#).
  - **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP):** [Article 46](#) directs the state to promote the **educational and economic interests of SCs**.
  - **Article 338** establishes the [National Commission for Scheduled Castes](#) to safeguard the rights of SCs.
  - **Legal Framework:**
    - **Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955:** Enacted to **penalize the practice of untouchability**, which was later amended and renamed the **Protection of Civil**

**Rights Act, 1976**, making untouchability, resulting from social and religious disabilities, **punishable**.

- **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**: A special law addressing **crimes specifically committed against SC/ST communities**, defined as "atrocities." It mandates the establishment of **Special Courts** for the speedy trial of such cases.
- **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**: This Act aims to **eliminate manual scavenging** and ensure the rehabilitation of those involved in the practice.
- **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015**: This amendment expanded the definition of atrocities to include **sexual offences against women from SC/ST communities**, thereby strengthening legal protection.

## What are the Major Issues Related to SCs and STs in India?

- **Economic Vulnerability: Land alienation and bonded labor**, coupled with the **non-payment of minimum wages**, place SCs in a disadvantaged economic position.
  - Around **34% of SCs live below the poverty line (BPL)**, compared to 9% of the general population.
- **Social Prejudices**: In regions like **Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan**, the dominance of other castes often results in **caste-based violence**.
  - In 2022, **97.7%** of atrocities against SCs were reported in **13 states**.
- **Weak Legal Enforcement**: There is a **failure** to implement **legal protections** effectively, and educational discrimination continues, as highlighted by the **Thorat Committee in 2007**.
  - Of the **498 districts** with the highest number of reported atrocities, **only 194** had established **special courts** to handle SC/ST cases.
- **Rejection of Traditional Roles**: Rising **political influence among SCs** due to the **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (CAA)** has led to tensions with dominant castes.
  - This has also resulted in a **rejection of traditional works** that SCs were once obligated to perform, **fueling further conflict**.
- **State Complacency**: The lack of **Protection Cells** and the **indifference of law enforcement** hinder timely intervention. Victims of atrocities also face **insufficient relief and rehabilitation**, worsening their plight.
  - Only 5 states- **Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, and Madhya Pradesh**, have set up **special police stations** to register complaints of offences against SCs and STs.
- **Systemic Failures**: Many schemes for SCs, like **NAMASTE** and **Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY)** face poor implementation, leading to unmet goals like **zero fatalities** among **sanitation workers**.
  - **Fund surrender** and delays, as seen in **Scheme of Residential Education for Students in High School in Targeted Area (SHRESHTA)** further weaken welfare efforts.

## What Measures can be Implemented to Enhance the Welfare of SCs and STs in India?

- **Strengthening Legal & Judicial Mechanisms**: Increase funding and improve **infrastructure** for exclusive SC/ST atrocity courts with **mandatory time-bound trials** and **specialized training** for judges and prosecutors.
  - **Enhance police sensitivity** through compulsory training, enforce **strict penalties for delays**, and provide **24/7 helplines** for prompt atrocity reporting.
- **Improve Reporting & Monitoring**: Implement **digital complaint portals** with a **national SC/ST atrocity tracking dashboard** and **whistleblower protections** for victims and witnesses.
  - **Map atrocity-prone districts** using NCRB data and deploy **special task forces** for preventive policing and conflict resolution.
- **Economic Empowerment**: Accelerate **Forest Rights Act, 2006**, **FRA claims** to secure land for STs and expand **Pradhan Mantri Dakshta aur Kushalta Sampaan Hitgrahi (PM-DAKSH)**

**skill training** with increased budgets and industry ties.

- Promote **financial inclusion** via **zero-balance accounts**, microloans, and **25% procurement quotas** for SC/ST-owned businesses in government tenders.

- **Education & Awareness:** Expand **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** to all tribal blocks.
  - Implement **anti-caste curriculum** and run mass campaigns to combat caste discrimination.
- **Political & Administrative Accountability:** Rank states on **SC/ST welfare**, linking **central funding** to performance, and empower the **National Commission for SCs/STs** with **suo moto investigation powers** plus mandatory **annual social audits** to Parliament.

## Conclusion

Effective **SC/ST welfare, strengthened legal mechanisms, better reporting, enhanced education, economic empowerment**. Addressing **deep-rooted caste prejudice, systemic failures, targeted policies, accountability, robust infrastructure** can reduce **atrocities**, uplift **marginalized communities**, ensure **social justice, inclusive development** in India's diverse society.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

Q. Examine the challenges faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India and suggest measures to effectively curb atrocities and promote their socio-economic welfare.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### **Prelims**

**Q. Which one of the following categories of Fundamental Rights incorporates protection against untouchability as a form of discrimination? (2020)**

- (a) Right against Exploitation
- (b) Right to Freedom
- (c) Right to Constitutional Remedies
- (d) Right to Equality

**Ans: (d)**

**Q. If a particular area is brought under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which one of the following statements best reflects the consequence of it? (2022)**

- (a) This would prevent the transfer of land of tribal people to non-tribal people.
- (b) This would create a local self-governing body in that area.
- (c) This would convert that area into a Union Territory.
- (d) The State having such areas would be declared a Special Category State.

**Ans: (a)**

### **Mains**

**Q.** Whether the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) can enforce the implementation of constitutional reservation for the Scheduled Castes in the religious minority institutions? Examine. (2018)

**Q.** What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes (STs)? (2017)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/advancing-sc-st-welfare-in-india>

