



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)

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