

Caste Based Atrocities - The Persisting Peril

Mains: *GS I - Indian Society - Communalism*

Why in News?

Despite constitutional promises of equality, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) face persistent caste-based violence and exclusion.

Why the caste based discrimination persists till today?

- **Persisting discriminations** - From assaults in rural areas for defying caste norms to urban discrimination in housing and employment, caste continues to deny citizens dignity and opportunity.
- **Belief in caste-based superiority** - It persists even today, enabling social elites to perpetrate acts of violence, ranging from forcing Dalits to drink urine to ostracising Adivasis for asserting land rights, with alarming impunity.
- **Societal failure** - The acts of caste based violence reflect not only individual prejudice but a societal failure to internalise humanitarian values.
- This raises questions about India's claim of being a civilised society.
- **Lack of governmental actions** - The current political dispensation, led by the current government, has fallen short in addressing this crisis.
 - **For instance**, the government occasionally promotes symbolic gestures by including Dalits and Adivasis in religious rituals, but these efforts lack substance.
- **Inappropriate narratives** - Hindutva narratives often frame resistance from marginalised communities as a threat to cultural unity.
- They often label activists as "Hinduphobic" and this rhetoric stifles legitimate demands for justice.
 - **For instance**, Hindutva narratives abused those who protested, an order of the Supreme Court that diluted provisions of the Atrocities Act.
- **Cultural Restrictions on Dalit** - Restrictions on Bahujan cultural expressions (as seen during the release of the Hindi film Phule) further alienate these communities from becoming part of the mainstream discourse.
- **Inefficient implementation of policies** - Policies promoting social justice, such as reservations in education and employment, are inconsistently implemented.
- As a result, social elites continue to control and dominate institutions.
- **Lack of policy framework** - The absence of a robust policy framework to bridge the gap between social elites and subaltern groups is glaring.
- **Lack of political will** - The political parties and its affiliated organisations have not launched a national campaign to challenge caste prejudice or foster inter-caste fraternity in the fear that it would dilute the privileges of dominant castes.

- **Elevation of dominant narratives** - The promotion of Brahmanical cultural narratives often relegates the struggles of Dalit and Adivasi communities to the margins.
- They portray the resistance of dalits as a challenge to traditional authority rather than as a fight for universal dignity.
- **Fragmented Dalit movements** - Today, such movements are fragmented or are relegated to the periphery, with little capacity to challenge current social ills.
- The response of civil society to caste atrocities has also waned.
- **Lack of strict enforcement of laws** - While there are laws, enforcement is hampered by delayed investigations, low conviction rates, and societal bias within the judiciary and the police.
 - **For instance**, a 2023 study by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights noted that over 60% of cases under the Atrocities Act remain pending in courts.
- This underscores the need for systemic reforms beyond legal provisions.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, released in late September, reported that 57,789 cases were registered against SCs in 2023.

It marks a 0.4% increase over the 57,582 cases reported in 2022, and 12,960 cases were registered against STs in 2023, a sharp 28.8% increase over the 10,064 cases reported in 2022.

What are the movements and measures that reshaped caste dynamics?

- **The Dalit Panthers** - This movement in the 1970s galvanised marginalised communities, asserting their right to political power and social prestige.
- **Rise of Dalit parties** - The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party in northern India further empowered Dalits and OBCs, amplifying their voices in governance and public discourse.
- **Upsurge of Dalit arts** - Intellectual influences and cultural initiatives, from Dalit literature to Adivasi art, laid claim to India's pluralistic heritage.
- **Rise of reformers** - Social reformers such as Mahatma Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, Periyar, and Mahatma Gandhi, who challenged the Brahmanical caste order, remain a beacon of hope.
- **Legal safeguards** - The anti-caste movements, coupled with constitutional safeguards such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, aimed to dismantle caste hierarchies.

What are the measures need to be taken?

- **Strengthening existing laws** - The state must strengthen the enforcement of existing laws, ensuring swift prosecution of perpetrators and sensitising law enforcement agencies about the ills of the caste system.
- **Evolving a National campaign** - Political leaders must champion a national campaign to promote egalitarian values, using education, the media, and public platforms to challenge conventional caste relationships based on hierarchies and

prejudices.

- **Building up of dialogue** - Civil society, including religious institutions, cultural organisations, and academia must foster dialogue to bridge divides between communities.
- **Firming up affirmative action** - The affirmative action policies should be rigorously implemented, with transparent monitoring to ensure equitable access to education, jobs, and resources.
- **Need for leadership** - Most crucially, Dalit, Adivasi, and Bahujan voices must be amplified.
- The legacy of resistance against the caste system needs a new podium and leadership.
- **Revival of anti-caste social movements** - It will build solidarity among marginalised social groups and re-establish the social justice agenda as a prime concern.

Reference

[The Hindu| Caste Based Atrocities](#)

