

## **I&B Advisory on the Term 'Dalit'**

### **Why in news?**

\n\n

Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry's advisory has asked the media to avoid using the term 'Dalit'.

\n\n

### **What is the rationale?**

\n\n

\n

- The advisory comes in compliance with orders of the Bombay and Madhya Pradesh High Courts.

\n

- The courts directed the Centre and state governments to refrain from using the term 'dalit'.

\n

- This is because the term found no mention in the Constitution of India or any statute.

\n

- Earlier, the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry issued a directive to use only the term 'Scheduled Castes' in all official matters.

\n

- So the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court directed the I&B Ministry to consider making a similar directive to the media.

\n

- The court did not actually go into the merits of using the term.

\n

\n\n

### **What is the National Commission for SC's view?**

\n\n

\n

- A decade ago, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes disfavoured the use of 'Dalit'.

\n

- The commission felt it was unconstitutional.  
\n
- This is because belonging to a 'Scheduled Caste' is a legal status.  
\n
- It is conferred on members of castes named in a list notified by the President under Article 341.  
\n
- Therefore, 'Scheduled Caste' is the appropriate way to refer to this class of people.  
\n

\n\n

### **Why is the term 'dalit' significant?**

\n\n

- The term has evolved over a period of time and has come to symbolise different things in different contexts.  
\n
- In the past, Dalits were referred to as 'untouchables'.  
\n
- But the official term during British rule was 'depressed classes'.  
\n
- Mahatma Gandhi sought to remove the stigma of 'pollution'.  
\n
- He thus used the term 'Harijans', or 'children of god'.  
\n
- In the course of time, the community rejected this appellation as patronising.  
\n
- It was only some decades ago that they began to refer to themselves as Dalits.  
\n
- 'Dalit' literally means 'downtrodden' or 'broken'.  
\n
- But it is a word loaded with emotions reflecting the struggle of a community to reassert its identity.  
\n
- "Dalit" is primarily an anti-caste, anti-Brahminical, anti-capitalistic, anti-oppression, anti-superstition rebellion.  
\n
- It advocates the claim to the rights that were denied to them for centuries.  
\n
- "Dalit" is an open category with a call to all those who believe in the project of annihilation of caste.  
\n

- There are literary works under the 'dalit literature' tag, which have had revolutionary impacts.

\n\n

## What are the disputes?

\n\n

- **Media** -The I&B Ministry's advisory specifies as "for all official transactions, matters."
- This is confusing as the media's references to the community are usually beyond official contexts.
- It is unreasonable to oppose the use of the term 'Dalit' in the media and in non-official contexts.
- **Right** - Significantly, 'Dalit' is now a nomenclature chosen and used by the community itself.
- It must be recognised that 'Dalit' is an expression of self-empowerment.
- Communities should have the right to decide what they wish to call themselves.
- Thwarting this is the principal factor that goes into maintaining caste supremacy.
- So the directive would be an attempt to deny the powerful and emotive meaning of the word 'Dalit'.
- **Identity** - Some Dalits prefer staying with the constitutionally-decided terminology of 'Scheduled Caste'.
- They feel it inappropriate to be "lower" when they have reached great heights in their careers.
- These are the ones who constantly seek to escape their stigmatised identities but are unable due to their known caste status.
- So, many refrained from using the word Dalit long before.
- They preferred identities such as Ambedkarite, Ravidassi or Valmiki to

identify with an exceptional individual.

\n

- **Term** - The government should indeed proceed with a workable nomenclature such as Scheduled Caste.

\n

- However, Scheduled Caste is more a bureaucratic normalisation.

\n

- It has no capacity to change the structures of social oppression.

\n

- “Dalit”, on the other hand, evokes emotions of change and positivity.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Hindu, Indian Express**

\n

