

Dalit Empowerment

1) Introduction

- The plight of the Dalits in India in all areas of life - economic, social, spiritual and economic has been pathetic throughout their history and continues as such even today, albeit a little alleviated.

2) The continuing discrimination

- Untouchability is still rampant in different forms.
- Privatisation — both of education and employment avenues — has chipped away at the sources of Dalit empowerment
- The Dalits' struggle for an equal share of honours in temple festivals has repeatedly ended in failure.
- Discrimination against Dalits is widespread and ingrained in the psyche across India, in rural settings in particular
- The number of registered cases of anti-Dalit atrocities are under reported
- The Prevention of atrocities Act has not made a huge impact
- Dalit women continue to be victims of violence and rape
- In spite of the fact that the Prevention of atrocities Act has introduced special courts for speedy trials, the conviction rate under this act has remained very low and has declined
- According to 2011 Census data, the unemployment rate for SCs between 15 and 59 years of age was 18 per cent, as compared to 14 per cent for the general population
- Dalits being severely under-represented in the leadership across political parties
- Recently Dalit crematoriums were constructed as upper caste Hindus were not allowing Dalits to perform their last rights in Hindu crematorium.
- Dalits are still heavily concentrated within certain geographical areas of cities, mostly in unauthorised settlements and poor neighbourhoods.
- Majority of Dalits are Landless labourers, Wage earners in rural areas and works in informal sector in urban areas
- Inhumane treatments like manual scavenging, Bonded labour and Human trafficking

3) Recent incidents

- Recent incidents reported from Tumakuru in Karnataka about village barber shops denying haircuts for dalits upholds
- In Madhya Pradesh a Dalit woman was beaten up because her shadow castes on an upper caste man
- Gau rakshaks killing Dalit men for taking the meat of a dead animal
- Inter caste marriages where Dalits were involved especially in the state of Tamil Nadu has led to killings of the caste members leading to law and order situation
- Suicide deaths by several Dalit students, recent one being suicide of Rohith Vemula
- 2015 – Jat-Dalit violence in Dangawas – Rajasthan where land dispute broke into a grossly painful incident of caste violence

4) Contribution made by women during framing of constitution

- DAKSHAYANI VELAYUDAN

- a) A prominent dalit leader and first dalit woman to graduate in India.
- b) She wanted abolition of Untouchability to be included in the constitution itself.
- c) She opposed separate electorate and reservation for dalits
- d) She wanted equality for dalits in all respects.

- HANSA MEHTA

- a) She opposed reservation for minorities, but, advocated reservation for Dalits due to historical injustice

5) Solution / Need of the hour

- Dalit empowerment could emerge through consensus not conflict, dialogue not dominance.
- Panacea for social ills lie in dialogue, discussion and debate
- Dalit empowerment should encompass representation, which would be made possible through integration and not confrontation.
- The present need is to depoliticise the Dalit discourse and strive towards an independent, objective, dispassionate and solution-centric Dalit narrative.
- Reservations combined with economic opportunities and social empowerment of Dalits could stem atrocities against them.
- Access to education, agricultural land and capital would help improve the condition of Dalits.

- India could learn from the experiences of Malaysian model of economic empowerment and South African policy for Blacks
- Public land and the cultivable wasteland could be distributed to Dalits for horticulture and livestock rearing.
- Instead of politicizing the Dalit issue, the creamy layer of Dalit community too should take up the responsibility to help them join the main-stream of the society, and work for their true development in a peaceful manner.
- Political actors, who have accommodated Dalits among their party and governance structures, should also believe in and work as conduits for social transformation.
- Making it easier for Dalits to start businesses would be more effective in bringing about social equality than any affirmative action
- The private sector has played a significant role by targeted inclusion of black enterprises in supply networks in the US. This will be necessary in India as well in the Dalit context.
- Stringent norms to enforce SC, ST Prevention of atrocities act with accountability of police for not enforcing the legislation in true spirit
- Disqualification of MP, MLA and elected leaders under representation of People act, if they indulge or instigates such violence
- Strengthening the powers of National commission for SC and ST, NHRC, SHRC to protect the interest of the oppressed classes
- Moral education on equality, Human rights, compassion, liberty and dignity of life since childhood to develop egalitarian mindset
- Promotion of Dalit leaders in local self government institutions
- Representation for Dalit and oppressed classes in Police force and other key administrative positions
- Crowd fund Dalit entrepreneurs, to be successful amidst other classes – who in turn contribute to class as part of CSR to further class interest
- Social boycott and non cooperation with groups who promote untouchability, discrimination on the basis of caste lines
- Voluntary giving up of Reservation for the cause of poorer section of the group —Eg. Son of a Dalit doctor, Dalit Politician, Dalit Businessmen must give way the reserved space for the son of a Dalit landless labourer, or son an urban wage earner

6) Progress towards Dalit Empowerment

- Recently the Madras High Court observed that it was both a moral obligation and the legal mandate for the state to permit Dalits to worship at the Badrakaliamman temple in Kallimedu in Tamilnadu.

- Years of following the policy of affirmative action has yielded a high degree of participation and representation of Dalits in politics and in governance
- Economic empowerment is the key for quality of life. Stand up India and Pradhan Mantri Mudra yojana gives an opportunity for the Dalits to become entrepreneurs.
- Recently the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Bill, passed by Parliament, made several critical changes.
- Reservations have given birth to Dalit entrepreneurs and a Dalit middle class benefiting from government jobs.
- Dalits started to protest against victimisation and discrimination and the most recent one is the Dalit Asmita Yatra
- Venture capital fund to help people of backward classes, and loans being given under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana Can empower Dalits further.
- Mahila Samakhya Programme has made significant contributions to women's empowerment belonging to the most marginalised communities, such as Dalits or Adivasis
- A new public procurement policy which mandates that 4% of 3 lakh crore procured by public sector enterprises annually be sourced from SC/ST enterprises

