

General Studies-1; Topic: Salient features of Indian Society; Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

Anti-Dalit Crimes in India

1) Introduction

- The violence on the 200th anniversary celebrations of the battle of Bhima-Koregaon has once again put the spotlight on violence against Dalits in India.
- Despite robust laws, violence against India's most oppressed people continues to rise.

2) Reasons

- Our feudal history, high poverty rate, and the important role religion has in society, are among the reasons
- Half of all atrocities committed against Dalits are related to land disputes
- Rising living standards of Dalits, this appears to have led to a backlash from privileged communities.
- Rising income and growing educational achievements may have led many Dalits to challenge caste barriers, causing resentment among upper caste groups
- There is also a possibility of the rise due to high registration and recognition of such crimes and dalits have increasingly started claiming their rights.
- Agrarian distress and lack of rural employment among the upper castes.
- Denial by dalits to continue with dehumanising jobs like manual scavenging, skinning animals, bonded labour, etc.
- Vote bank politics and populist policies project dalits in bad light and fuel anti-dalit sentiments.
- Large scale prevalence of uneducated, low skilled, unemployed youth falls prey to such provocation and unleashes violence.

3) Present Status

- The data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) show that the rate of crimes against Dalits has risen in recent years, even as the conviction rate for such crimes has declined.
- Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan are the states with most instances of crimes against Scheduled Caste people.
- Crime against Dalits – ranging from rape, murder, beatings, and violence related to land matters have increased.
- In 2016, an estimated 214 incidents of crimes against SCs were reported per million SC population, up from 207 the previous year
- While Dalits continue to be the poorest of all social groups in absolute terms, their position vis-a-vis upper castes has improved over the past decade.
- While Indian law has officially abolished the caste hierarchy, untouchability is in many ways still a practice.
- Dalit women continue to be victims of violence and rape
- Dalits are still heavily concentrated within certain geographical areas of cities, mostly in unauthorised settlements and poor neighbourhoods.

4) Concerns / Challenges

- Enforcement of laws appears to be very weak.
- The Prevention of atrocities Act has not made a huge impact

- Lack of political and administrative will to resolve crimes against dalits.
- Dalits are severely under-represented in the leadership across political parties.

5) Way Forward

- The present need is to depoliticise the Dalit discourse and strive towards an independent, objective and solution-centric Dalit narrative.
- 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
- Social boycott and non cooperation with groups who promote untouchability, discrimination on the basis of caste lines
- Crowd fund Dalit entrepreneurs who in turn contribute as part of CSR to further class interest
- Address structural issues of agrarian distress, employment generation, rural-urban divide, expansion of bank credit etc.
- India could learn from the experiences of Malaysian model of economic empowerment and South African policy for Blacks
- 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.
- 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