

JOINT STAKEHOLDER REPORT

To the 20th and 21st Periodic Report of the State Party (Republic of India)

To

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

**National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights
(NCDHR)
INDIA, 2026**

In Collaboration with

All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM) | Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI) | Dalit Bahujan Shramik Union (DBSU) | Esther Foundation | Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DhRDNet) | Equera-Institute for Inclusive and Sustainable Development Foundation | Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFOD) | National Council of Women Leaders (NCWL) | National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) | National Dalit Christian Watch (NDCW) | Social Awareness Society For Youth (SASY) | Sustainable Social Impact through Rights and Awareness (SSIRA Foundation) | The Inclusivity Project (TIP)

Introduction

India is home to one of the world's oldest and most enduring systems of descent-based discrimination. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and decades of legislative and policy interventions, caste continues to shape access to justice, education, employment, healthcare, political participation, and other fundamental rights for millions of Scheduled Castes. While the legal abolition of untouchability and the enactment of protective legislation represent significant constitutional commitments, caste-based discrimination remains deeply embedded within social institutions, governance structures, and everyday life.

This Civil Society Report is submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in advance of India's periodic review under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The Report is guided by CERD's long-standing interpretation that discrimination is based on Descent under Article 1 of the Convention. It includes discrimination against communities subjected to caste and analogous systems of inherited status, as affirmed in General Recommendation No. 29.¹ The report focuses on caste-based discrimination against Scheduled Castes. References to Scheduled Tribes are included only where legislation, official data, or institutional mechanisms jointly address both communities or where disaggregated information is unavailable.

The report demonstrates that caste discrimination extends far beyond incidents of physical violence. It continues to manifest through barriers to justice, discrimination in access to public services, education, and healthcare; hazardous and stigmatized occupations; underrepresentation in public institutions; shrinking civic space for Dalit human rights defenders; and intersectional discrimination affecting Scheduled Caste women, children, Dalit Christians, and Dalit Muslims. These experiences are not uniform. Scheduled Caste women and girls, persons with disabilities, older persons, transgender persons, and LGBTQIA+ persons often face compounded forms of discrimination that remain inadequately reflected in laws, policies, and official data, limiting their access to justice and essential public services. Many of these violations remain inadequately documented due to underreporting, weak institutional accountability, the absence of comprehensive caste-disaggregated data, and limited use of an intersectional approach in policy design and implementation.

This report highlights the gap between India's legal commitments and their implementation. It calls for stronger institutional accountability, effective implementation of existing legal safeguards, improved access to justice, comprehensive caste-disaggregated data systems and meaningful measures to eliminate structural caste discrimination. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations presented in this report will assist CERD in its constructive dialogue with the

¹General Recommendation No. 29, which recognizes caste as a form of descent-based discrimination, the report examines India's compliance with its obligations under the Convention and documents the continuing realities of caste-based discrimination.

State Party and contribute to advancing substantive equality, dignity and human rights for Scheduled Castes in India.

Executive Summary

This Joint Stakeholder Report has been prepared by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) and other civil society organizations, Dalit human rights defenders, researchers, lawyers, and community-based organizations. Established in 1998, NCDHR emerged from a nationwide collective effort by Scheduled Caste activists and civil society organizations to assess the status of human rights, dignity, and social justice for Scheduled Castes fifty years after India's independence. Since its inception, NCDHR has worked to document caste-based discrimination, strengthen access to justice, monitor the implementation of protective legislation, and advocate for the elimination of caste-based discrimination at national and international human rights forums. This report builds upon that continuing engagement by presenting General evidence on the implementation of India's obligations under the ICERD.

Key Findings—

1. Between 2019 and 2023, an average of **158 Scheduled Castes faced caste-based atrocities** every day in India, amounting to nearly seven atrocities every hour.
2. In 2024, **55,698 crimes** were registered against Scheduled Castes. Despite an **82.0% charge-sheeting** rate under the Scheduled Castes and scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in 2024, the **conviction rate remained only 33.9%**, while **95.2% of cases were pending** before courts, reflecting persistent delays in investigation, prosecution, and trial.
3. NCRB 2024 recorded **4,262 rape cases against Scheduled Caste women and girls**, including **1,579 minor girls**. The report further documents the continuing Devadasi/Jogini system and the exploitation of Scheduled Caste women sugarcane workers, including coercive hysterectomies linked to labour conditions.
4. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24, Scheduled Castes remain **disproportionately concentrated in casual labour and low-paid informal employment** compared with the national average. Caste-linked hazardous occupations also persist, with the 2018 Manual Scavenger Survey identifying **52,326 manual scavengers**.
5. Government initiatives have expanded opportunities; e.g., the National SC/ST Hub has supported over 1.59 lakh entrepreneurs, and SC/ST procurement increased to Rs. 3,731.5 Crore in 2024-25. However, **weak enforcement** and **institutional bias** continue to limit the effective realization of substantive equality.
6. The report identifies significant **gaps in the availability of caste-disaggregated data** across key sectors, including health, mental health, higher judiciary, private sector

employment, corporate leadership, media, housing, climate vulnerability, digital spaces, and implementation of welfare schemes.

7. Dalit human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and community leaders continue to face **legal harassment, intimidation, surveillance, restrictions on funding, and other forms of retaliation** that constrain documentation, advocacy, and access to justice for affected communities.

Overall, the report finds that the effectiveness of India's constitutional, legal and institutional framework continues to be undermined by significant implementation gaps, resulting in the persistence of caste-based discrimination and the unequal enjoyment of rights by Scheduled Castes. The evidence presented throughout the report further demonstrates that caste remains a pervasive form of descent-based discrimination in India, reinforcing the need for the State Party to recognize caste within the scope of Article 1 of ICERD, consistent with CERD General Recommendation No. 29, and to comprehensively report on measures adopted to eliminate caste-based discrimination against Scheduled Castes in future reporting cycles.

Methodology

This report is based on a participatory and consultative process undertaken with Scheduled Caste communities, including women, youth, sanitation workers, and survivors of caste-based violence across different regions of India. The preparation of the report involved consultations with grassroots organizations, community-based groups, human rights defenders, lawyers, researchers, academicians, and civil society organizations working on caste discrimination, access to justice, labour rights and human rights protection. Inputs were also gathered through consultations and thematic discussions with partner organizations and affected communities.

The report is based on a review and analysis of official government data, including National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), parliamentary questions and committee reports, government notifications, judicial decisions, and reports of statutory bodies. It also draws upon documented case studies, field documentation, reports of national and international human rights organizations, academic research, and credible media reports to examine recent developments and implementation gaps. Information from these sources has been cross-verified, wherever possible, to ensure accuracy and provide a comprehensive assessment of caste-based discrimination in India.

Normative Framework

A. International Obligations

India is a State Party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and has undertaken to eliminate discrimination based on race, colour,

descent, or national or ethnic origin. Through General Recommendation No. 29, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination clarified that "descent" includes caste and analogous systems of inherited status, thereby bringing caste-based discrimination within the scope of the Convention. The Committee is currently developing a new General Recommendation on Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD), recognising that analogous forms of descent-based discrimination exist in different parts of the world. Within this broader framework, the present report focuses specifically on caste-based discrimination against Scheduled Castes in India as a form of descent-based discrimination under Article 1 of ICERD and General Recommendation No. 29. In spite of this interpretation, India continues to reject the inclusion of caste within the scope of descent-based discrimination under ICERD.

India is also bound by obligations under the ICCPR, ICESCR, CEDAW, CRC, and CRPD, as well as International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards relating to discrimination, forced labour, child labour, and decent work. India has further committed itself to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), all of which remain closely linked to the elimination of caste-based discrimination and exclusion.

B. Constitutional and Legal Framework

The Constitution of India guarantees equality before the law under Article 14, prohibits discrimination under Articles 15 and 16 and abolishes untouchability under Article 17. Constitutional provisions also provide for affirmative action measures, including reservations in education, public employment, and political representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. India has enacted several pieces of legislation aimed at addressing caste discrimination and violence, including the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955; the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989; and the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013. Article 21 (A) of the constitution of India guarantees every child between the age of six and fourteen years the fundamental rights to free and compulsory education, to be provided by the state in the manner prescribed by law. This constitutional mandate was operationalised through the Right of children to free and compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act). Section 2 (d) of the Act defines a "child belonging to a disadvantaged group" to include children from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) among other socially and educationally disadvantaged categories. By recognising these groups as disadvantaged and extending specific protections to them, the Act seeks to ensure equitable access to education and prohibits discriminatory exclusion from the educational system.

India has also established statutory bodies, including the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, and National Commission for Safai Karamcharis, to monitor safeguards and address

grievances concerning marginalised communities. However, these institutions largely possess recommendatory powers and continue to face limitations concerning enforcement, implementation, monitoring and accountability.

Despite the existence of constitutional safeguards, special legislation, and statutory institutions, implementation remains weak and inconsistent. Scheduled caste communities continue to face barriers in access to justice, delayed investigations, low conviction rates, weak enforcement of anti-discrimination protections, and poor implementation of rehabilitation and compensation mechanisms.

Article 1

Non-recognition of Caste under ICERD

Article 1 of ICERD defines racial discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, **descent**, or national or ethnic origin that impairs the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The inclusion of the term "descent" is central to addressing caste-based discrimination.

Through **General Recommendation No. 29**, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has clarified that "descent" includes caste and analogous systems of inherited status. CERD has consistently recognized that communities affected by caste discrimination experience structural exclusion in education, employment, housing, public services, and access to justice, and has affirmed that discrimination based on work and descent falls within the scope of the Convention.

India, however, continues to reject the inclusion of caste within the meaning of "descent" under ICERD, maintaining that caste and race are distinct categories and that caste-based discrimination falls outside CERD's mandate. In practice, caste discrimination in India remains a hereditary system of social hierarchy that shapes access to social, economic, political, and cultural rights. Constitutional guarantees and legal protections have not eliminated systemic discrimination, exclusion, and stigmatization faced by Scheduled Castes. Occupational segregation remains a defining feature, with Scheduled Castes disproportionately engaged in stigmatized and hazardous occupations, including sanitation work, waste handling, and manual scavenging. Although legally prohibited, manual scavenging continues to persist, reflecting the enduring relationship between caste, inherited occupations, and degrading working conditions.

Article 1(4) further recognizes the legitimacy of special measures for historically disadvantaged communities. While reservation and affirmative action policies have played an important role in addressing historical discrimination against Scheduled Castes, implementation gaps, exclusion from private sector employment, privatization, and persistent barriers in education, employment, and public services continue to limit substantive equality.

India's continued refusal to recognize caste as a form of descent-based discrimination undermines the object and purpose of ICERD and weakens the effective implementation of its obligations under the Convention. Recognition of caste under ICERD remains essential for ensuring accountability, effective protection, and substantive equality for Scheduled Castes.

Article 2

Atrocities Against the Scheduled Caste

Despite CERD's previous recommendation (Recommendation 14) calling upon the State Party to provide effective protection to Scheduled Castes against discrimination and violence, caste-based atrocities continue to remain alarmingly high in India, reflecting the persistence of structural caste violence even with constitutional guarantees and special legislation.

According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data analysed by the NCDHR, crimes against Scheduled Castes increased by nearly 28% between 2019 and 2023, rising from 45,935 cases in 2019 to 57,789 cases in 2023. The five-year analysis further indicates that, on average, 158 persons belonging to Scheduled Castes faced caste-based atrocities every day in India between 2019 and 2023, meaning nearly seven persons belonging to Scheduled Castes faced atrocities every hour. The most recent NCRB data for 2024 shows a slight numerical decline in registered cases, with reported crimes against Scheduled Castes reducing to 55,698. The 2024 data continues to reflect the seriousness of caste atrocities, recording 4,262 cases of rape against Scheduled Castes, 871 murders, 1,182 cases of attempted murder, and 161 cases of arson.² Persistent barriers in the registration of FIRs, underreporting, police reluctance to invoke provisions of the SC/ST (PoA) Act, social pressure for compromise, and continuing conflict situations in tribal regions significantly affect official crime statistics.

At the same time, official crime statistics themselves represent only a partial picture of caste violence in India. NCRB data captures only registered cases, while large-scale underreporting continues due to fear of retaliation, economic dependency on dominant caste groups, social intimidation, and distrust in law enforcement mechanisms. The gap between reported cases and lived realities remains particularly severe in rural and caste-segregated regions where dominant caste social control directly influences access to police, administration, and justice systems.

Caste-based violence also targets inter-caste couples through threats, social boycotts and so-called "honour" crimes, undermining their rights to equality, liberty and free choice of marriage. Despite Supreme Court directions, India lacks a comprehensive legal framework to prevent such violence and ensure effective protection.

² National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2024 - Volume II* (2025), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, available at: <https://www.ncrb.gov.in/uploads/files/2CrimeinIndia2024-VolumeII.pdf>

Crimes Against Scheduled Caste Women

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 15, 2007), the Committee expressed grave concern over the prevalence of sexual violence against Dalit women, particularly rape committed by members of dominant castes, and urged the State Party to effectively investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators; ensure victim support; strengthen police training and public awareness; and establish specialised mechanisms to address caste-based sexual violence.

Nearly two decades later, these concerns remain unresolved. NCRB 2024 data further highlights the continuing vulnerability of Scheduled Caste women and girls to gender-based caste violence. A total of 4,262 rape cases against Scheduled Caste women and girls were recorded nationwide, including 2,683 cases involving adult women and 1,579 cases involving minors below the age of 18. In addition, 2,129 cases were registered for assault with intent to outrage modesty, 525 cases for sexual harassment, and 298 cases for kidnapping and abduction of Scheduled Caste women and girls.³ These figures reflect the intersection of caste and gender-based violence, where sexual violence is frequently used as a tool of domination, humiliation, and social control against Scheduled Caste communities. At the same time, these numbers represent only reported cases, while fear of retaliation, social stigma, police refusal to register complaints, and pressure for compromise continue to contribute to significant underreporting of violence against Scheduled Caste women and girls.

In Maharashtra, Scheduled Caste women engaged in sugarcane-cutting face severe caste- and gender-based exploitation. Predominantly drawn from landless and marginalized communities, many are reportedly coerced into undergoing hysterectomies due to harsh working conditions, lack of sanitation and healthcare, wage losses during menstruation, and pressure from labour contractors. Their continued concentration in this hazardous work reflects entrenched caste-based occupational segregation and limited access to labour rights, healthcare, and social protection.⁴

Devdasi/Jogini

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 18), the Committee urged the State Party to effectively enforce laws prohibiting the Devdasi system, punish those responsible for the practice, rehabilitate victims, and undertake training and awareness-raising measures to eliminate such practices.

³ National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2024 - Volume II* (2025), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, available at: <https://www.ncrb.gov.in/uploads/files/2CrimeinIndia2024-VolumeII.pdf>

⁴ *The Wire*, “Climate, Caste and the Surgical Scars of Sugarcane Labour in Maharashtra” (2024), available at: <https://thewire.in/labour/climate-caste-and-the-surgical-scars-of-sugarcane-labour-in-maharashtra>.

The practice of “marrying” young girls from marginalized caste communities to deities, commonly known as the Devadasi system, continues to exist in several parts of India despite legal prohibition. The practice disproportionately affects Scheduled Caste girls and women and represents a form of caste and gender-based sexual exploitation carried out in the name of religion and tradition. The term “Devadasi” literally means “female slave of God,” and rights groups and scholars have widely described the system as a form of religiously sanctioned prostitution rooted in caste hierarchy, patriarchy, and economic vulnerability.⁵ Although states such as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh enacted laws prohibiting the Devadasi system decades ago, implementation remains weak. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), while taking suo motu cognizance of the issue, observed that notwithstanding anti-Devadasi laws, the practice continues under different names and ceremonial forms. Reports placed before the NHRC stated that more than 70,000 women were still living as Devadasis in Karnataka alone, while a commission headed by Justice Raghunath Rao reportedly identified nearly 80,000 Devadasis across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.⁶ Addressing ongoing Devadasi practices has become increasingly difficult because dedication ceremonies are now conducted privately in homes or during local village rituals to avoid legal scrutiny.

Bonded Labour and Caste-Based Exploitation

In Recommendation 23 of its previous Concluding Observations, CERD urged the State Party to effectively implement the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 and strengthen measures to eliminate bonded labour affecting Scheduled Castes.

Despite this recommendation, bonded and forced labour continue to disproportionately affect Scheduled Castes, particularly in agriculture, brick kilns, stone quarries, domestic work, and other forms of manual labour. Scholars have observed that bonded labour in India cannot be understood merely as an economic issue but as a structural system linked to caste oppression and social dependency (Samonova, 2023). Although Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude” and India enacted the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, implementation remains weak and inconsistent. The Walk Free Foundation’s *Global Slavery Index* estimates that approximately 11.05 million people are living in conditions of modern slavery in India, the highest absolute number globally, with a prevalence of nearly 8 persons per 1,000 population.⁷

⁵ Amit Anand, *Temple Prostitution in India - An Exploitative Practice in the Name of Religion* (2024), SSRN, available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4887242>.

⁶ NHRC, *Continued menace of Devadasi system despite laws banning it*, Press Release, 2022, available at: <https://nhrc.nic.in/media/press-release/nhrc-notices-to-the-centre-state-governments-karnataka-kerala-tamil-nadu-andhra-pradesh-telangana-maharashtra-over-continued-menace-devadasi-system-despite-laws-banning-it-gives-six-weeks-to-respond>

⁷ Walk Free Foundation, *Global Slavery Index 2023: India Snapshot* (2023), accessed 23 May 2026, <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/09/27163225/GSI-Snapshot-India.pdf>

According to data placed before Parliament by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, a total of 315,302 bonded labourers had been identified and released in India as of 31 March 2024, while only 308,166 had reportedly been rehabilitated. States such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan continue to report high numbers of identified bonded labourers.⁸

Child Labour

Although CERD's previous recommendation 23 and Article 24 of the Indian Constitution prohibits child labour in hazardous occupations and India has enacted the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, millions of children continue to work in agriculture, brick kilns, domestic work, waste picking, and other informal sectors closely tied to caste-based occupations. Article 21A of the Indian Constitution guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged six to fourteen, emphasizing the importance of education for individual and social development⁹. However, child labour remains a significant barrier to achieving this right, as it prevents children from attending school and perpetuates cycles of poverty and exclusion¹⁰. To address this issue, the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 prohibits the employment of children under fourteen in most occupations, aligning with the obligations of Article 21A.¹¹

India does not maintain a centralized real-time database on the number of Scheduled Caste children engaged in child labour, reflecting serious monitoring and accountability gaps. According to the Census 2011, approximately 10.1 million children aged 5–14 years were engaged in labour in India.¹² Studies consistently show a disproportionate concentration of child labour among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities due to caste-based occupations, poverty, and exclusion from education.¹³ The Telangana State Socio-Economic Survey (2024–2025) identified nearly 89,000 child labourers in the state, with Scheduled Caste Madiga communities constituting around 14% and Scheduled Tribe Lambadi communities around 11% among identified child labourers, reflecting the continuing caste dimension of child labour in India.¹⁴

⁸ Lok Sabha Secretariat, *Unstarred Question No. 185 regarding Bonded Labour* (Government of India, answered in Parliament), accessed 23 May 2026,

https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabhaquestions/annex/185/AS116_ZovXu2.pdf?source=pqals

⁹ Constitution of India, Art. 21A; Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002.

¹⁰ Unnikrishnan J.P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh, (1993) 1 SCC 645; Constitution of India, Art. 21A.

¹¹ Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (as amended by Act 35 of 2016), ss. 3–3A; Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment.

¹² International Labour Organization (ILO), *Fact Sheet: Child Labour in India*, available at: <https://www.ilo.org/publications/fact-sheet-child-labour-india>

¹³ UNICEF Innocenti, *Child Labour and Schooling in India* (2024), UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/9356/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Child-labour-schooling-India-Report-2024.pdf>

¹⁴ CNBC TV18, *Telangana Caste Survey: 89,000 Child Labourers Exist in State, Mostly from SC/ST Communities* (2024), available at:

Manual Scavenging

CERD's recommendation (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 23) to effectively eliminate manual scavenging remains inadequately implemented. Despite the enactment of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, official government responses continue to distinguish between "manual scavenging" and "hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks." This administrative separation obscures the shared caste-based nature of these forms of sanitation labour and often results in sewer and septic tank deaths being treated as isolated occupational incidents rather than as manifestations of entrenched caste-based degrading work.

According to information provided by the Government of India, at least 471 sanitation workers died due to hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks between 2019 and October 2025. Parliamentary responses and government disclosures further indicate continuing deaths even after the implementation of the National Action for Mechanized Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) scheme and repeated commitments toward mechanization and “zero fatalities” in sanitation work.¹⁵ Recent deaths in multiple states further demonstrate the persistence of hazardous caste-linked sanitation labour. In May 2026, two sanitation workers died in Nagpur after being forced to enter a toxic sewage chamber without oxygen support or protective equipment. Investigations revealed that workers had entered the chamber under instructions from private contractors and without mandatory safety mechanisms.¹⁶

Sanitation work and sewer cleaning remain overwhelmingly performed by the Scheduled Castes communities, particularly Safai Karamcharis, reflecting entrenched patterns of hereditary occupation and social exclusion. The creation of the National Commission of Safai Karamchari (NCSK) and the National Commission for Scheduled Caste has not helped in the eradication of the practice of cleaning the filth by people belonging to the Scheduled Caste community.

Private Sector Discrimination: Hiring bias and anti-discrimination compliance

Research consistently demonstrates that caste remains a significant determinant of labour-market outcomes in India. Siddique's audit study found that lower-caste applicants had to submit significantly more job applications than upper-caste applicants to receive equivalent interview callbacks, revealing discrimination at the hiring stage¹⁷. Similarly, Axmann, Swanson, and

<https://www.cnbtv18.com/india/telangana-caste-survey-89000-child-labourers-exist-in-state-mostly-from-sc-st-ws-l-19888571.htm>

¹⁵ Press Information Bureau, *Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers* (2025), Government of India, available at:

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2204720®=1&lang=1>

¹⁶ *The Times of India*, “2 Manual Scavengers Suffocate to Death in Toxic Chamber, Another Critical” (2025), available at:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/2-manual-scavengers-suffocate-to-death-in-toxic-chamber-another-critical/articleshow/131144798.cms>

¹⁷ Siddique, Z. (2008). Caste Based Discrimination: Evidence and Policy. IZA Discussion Paper, 3737.

Cuspinera Contreras identified caste-based wage discrimination in the private sector using nationally representative survey data. Beyond wages, caste-based exclusion also affects access to employment opportunities, professional networks, and career mobility, creating structural barriers that continue to limit Scheduled Castes participation and advancement in the labour market¹⁸. Hiring in Indian industry is often characterized as highly personalized and informal, with caste, community, language, and regional affiliations influencing recruitment decisions¹⁹. Thorat, Attewell, and Rizvi's study on urban labour market discrimination provides compelling evidence of this phenomenon, finding that "discriminatory processes operate even at the first stage of the application process" and that private employers "repeatedly favoured job applicants from higher caste backgrounds."²⁰

Caste is rarely acknowledged within corporate diversity discourse, resulting in voluntary initiatives that fail to address structural discrimination in recruitment and career advancement.²¹ The absence of mandatory caste-disaggregated workforce data and diversity reporting further limits transparency, accountability, and effective monitoring.²²

Discrimination Against Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 21), The Committee recommends that the State Party restore the eligibility for affirmative action benefits of all members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes having converted to another religion. However, the concerns have not been resolved.

Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims continue to face caste-based discrimination, social exclusion, residential segregation, and occupational marginalization despite conversion. However, they remain excluded from Scheduled Caste status under Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and are consequently denied reservations and other constitutional safeguards available to Scheduled Castes professing Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism. Although the Justice Ranganath Misra Commission recommended extending Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims, recognizing that conversion does not erase caste-based disadvantage, the recommendation remains unimplemented.

The continuing discrimination faced by Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims is evident in both public and private spheres. In July 2025, Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu staged a hunger strike

¹⁸ Pankaj, A. K. (2016). Land, labour and market: exclusion of dalits in Uttar Pradesh. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 8(2), 196-205.

¹⁹ Mandal, B. C. (2009). Dalits and reservations in the private sector. *Voice of Dalit*, 2(1), 45-58.

²⁰ Thorat, S., Attewell, P., Rizvi, F. F., 2009, 'Urban Labour Market Discrimination', Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi

²¹ Dhanaraj, C. (2017). Being Dalit, Doing Corporate. More info available at <https://medium.com/iamtech-series/being-dalit-doing-corporate-9d241919af16>

²² Singh, (2017). Social Justice Incomplete without Reservation in the Private Sector. More info available at https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2017/0806_pd/social-justice-incomplete-without-reservation-private-sector

alleging caste-based discrimination within the Church, including exclusion from church committees, unequal participation in religious festivals and denial of equal treatment in religious affairs.²³ At the same time, studies on Pasmanda Muslims and urban exclusion have documented persistent residential segregation, social marginalization and discrimination faced by caste-oppressed Muslim communities. Dalit Christians are often described as facing “triple discrimination” as they continue to experience caste-based exclusion in wider society, remain excluded from Scheduled Caste protections due to religious conversion and, in some cases, face caste-based segregation within religious institutions themselves. These conditions raise serious concerns regarding equality and non-discrimination and demonstrate that caste-based discrimination continues to affect Scheduled Castes irrespective of religious identity.²⁴

Article 3

Housing: Urban segregation and housing discrimination

A growing body of research demonstrates that caste-based residential segregation remains a persistent feature of urban India despite rapid urbanisation.²⁵ Contrary to the assumption that cities weaken caste identities and promote social integration, studies show that Scheduled Castes continue to face significant barriers in accessing housing and are often concentrated in specific neighbourhoods.²⁶ Research based on Census data reveals that many urban localities in cities such as Delhi, Kolkata, and Rajkot have little or no Scheduled Castes presence, indicating patterns of spatial exclusion that limit residential choice and reinforce segregation.²⁷ Such exclusion is not merely a consequence of economic disadvantage but is deeply rooted in caste-based discrimination operating within rental and property markets.²⁸ The consequences of this segregation extend beyond housing. Residential exclusion restricts access to quality education, employment opportunities, infrastructure, healthcare, sanitation, and other essential public services, thereby perpetuating broader social and economic inequalities.²⁹

²³ *The New Indian Express*, “Dalit Christians Allege Discrimination in Church, Sit on Hunger Strike” (2025), available at: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2025/Jul/22/dalit-christians-allege-discrimination-in-church-sit-on-hunger-strike>.

²⁴ *Article 14*, “Muslims, Dalits Face the Worst Residential Segregation & Discrimination in Urban Cities, Study Confirms” (2022), available at: <https://article-14.com/post/muslims-dalits-face-the-worst-residential-segregation-discrimination-in-urban-cities-study-confirms-628c3e5162638>.

²⁵ Sharma, B. (2022). Muslims & Dalits Face the Worst Residential Segregation & Discrimination in Urban Cities, Study Confirms. More info available at <https://tribe.article-14.com/post/muslims-dalits-face-the-worst-residential-segregation-discrimination-in-urban-cities-study-confirms-628c3e5162638>

²⁶ sabrangindia (2023). Theirs & ours, how Indian cities discriminate against Dalits & Muslims. More info available at <https://sabrangindia.in/theirs-ours-how-indian-cities-discriminate-against-dalits-muslims/>

²⁷ Ibid 113

²⁸ Mishra, V. K., & Khan, K. (2023). Determinants of discrimination in access to housing for marginalised social groups in India. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 9(1), 7-26.

²⁹ Ibid 114

As a result, many Scheduled Caste households are confined to informal settlements and marginalized urban spaces characterized by poor living conditions, inadequate infrastructure, limited public services, and heightened vulnerability to displacement and eviction.³⁰ These patterns reflect deeply entrenched social prejudices that continue to shape residential opportunities and urban development. Scholars argue that such exclusion not only stigmatizes Scheduled Caste communities but also produces an “apartheid-like” spatial division within cities, undermining social integration, equal citizenship, and freedom of movement.³¹ In its previous concluding observations on India, the Committee welcomed the then Prime Minister's acknowledgment of the parallel between untouchability and apartheid, reinforcing the need to address continuing forms of caste-based segregation under Article 3 of ICERD. Overall, the literature suggests that urbanisation has not dismantled caste-based spatial inequalities.

Article 4

Hate Speech and Caste-Based Incitement

Even with constitutional guarantees and legal protections, caste supremacist narratives, discriminatory propaganda, and hate speech persist throughout India's social, political, and digital spheres. Caste-based abuse and derogatory language targeting Scheduled Castes and Ambedkarite communities are frequently visible on social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and X. A 2024 report on caste hate speech in digital spaces documented widespread circulation of derogatory slurs, anti-reservation narratives, and anti-Ambedkar content targeting Scheduled Castes and caste-oppressed communities. The report further noted the existence of dominant caste digital groups and networks that circulate casteist content and reinforce caste hierarchies within online spaces.³²

Expressions such as “Aarakshanjeevi” (literally, “one who lives off reservation”³³), “Bheemta” (a slur mocking followers of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar), “Neela Kabootar” (“blue pigeon,” mocking those associated with Ambedkarite identity), and similar derogatory terminology are frequently used online to stigmatize Dalit assertion, constitutional protections, and affirmative action policies.³⁴

³⁰ Tamta, M. (2026). *Unveiling Dalit perspectives: evictions in informal settlements in India* (Doctoral dissertation, Boston University).

³¹ Gopalakrishnan, A. (2015) Housing: We need a law against discrimination. More info available at <https://www.tarunkhaitan.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Housing-We-Need-a-Law-Against-Discrimination-Time-s-of-India-21-June-2015-1.pdf>

³² National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, *Caste-Based Abuse Report* (2024), available at: <https://www.ncdhr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Caste-Based-Abuse-Report.pdf>

³³ Reservation in India is a system of affirmative action and positive discrimination. Mandated by the Constitution of India, it guarantees a fixed percentage of seats in government jobs and higher education institutions, and legislative bodies for historically disadvantaged and marginalized communities including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

³⁴ A.R. Naveen Sahu, “Aur Bina Pani Ke...” (2025), Threads post, available at: https://www.threads.com/@ar_naveen_sahu/post/DT1qDk0iWP_/aur-bina-pani-k-gu-kha-k-saal-tak-zinda-rahne-val-e-bhi-bharat-me-pay-e-jate-h-ar

Article 5

Police Response

In its previous Concluding Observations (Recommendation 14), the Committee urged the State Party to provide effective protection to Scheduled Castes against acts of discrimination and violence, introduce mandatory training on the application of the SC/ST (PoA) Act for police and take disciplinary or criminal action against law enforcement officials who fail in their duty to protect or investigate crimes against Scheduled Castes.

Despite the SC/ST (PoA) Act being enacted to provide immediate protection and speedy justice to Scheduled Caste and Tribe, its implementation continues to suffer from serious failures in policing, investigations, and institutional accountability. Scheduled caste survivors frequently face refusal to register First Information Reports (FIRs), pressure to reach informal settlements, and failure to invoke relevant provisions of the Act. Rights groups have also documented dilution of complaints, including omission of caste-related facts and failure to read recorded statements back to complainants before obtaining signatures or thumb impressions. Such practices weaken cases at the very initial stage and significantly undermine access to justice for Scheduled Castes survivors.³⁵

Rule 7(2) of the SC/ST (PoA) Rules, 2016 mandates completion of investigations and filing of charge sheets within 60 days. However, this statutory timeline is routinely violated, with most states filing charge sheets beyond the prescribed period in a majority of cases. Although the overall charge-sheeting rate for crimes against Scheduled Castes increased to 82% in 2024, 17,164 cases remained pending investigation, reflecting persistent delays in ensuring timely justice.

Rule 7 of the SC/ST (PoA) Act mandates that investigations into offenses under the Act must be conducted by a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) or an officer of higher rank in order to ensure seriousness, impartiality and proper investigation of caste atrocity cases. However, in practice, investigations are frequently conducted by lower-ranking officials in violation of statutory requirements. Courts have repeatedly acquitted accused persons solely on procedural grounds where investigations were carried out by unauthorized officers, without substantively examining the merits of the case or the justice owed to survivors.³⁶ This results in Scheduled Caste survivors being denied justice due to administrative and institutional lapses beyond their control.

³⁵ Centre for Law and Policy Research, *When Prevention of Atrocities Act Becomes a Victim in the Hands of Police and Executive* (2021), available at:

<https://clpr.org.in/blog/when-prevention-of-atrocities-act-becomes-a-victim-in-the-hands-of-police-and-executive/>

³⁶ Supreme Today AI, *Effect of Invalid SC/ST Rule 7 Investigation* (n.d.), available at:

<https://supremetoday.ai/issue/effect-invalid-scst-rule-7-investigation>

Caste segregation and Untouchability (including settlement and access to common resources)

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 13), the Committee urged the State Party to strengthen enforcement of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, eliminate untouchability and segregation, and ensure equal access for Scheduled Castes to places of worship, housing, water sources and other public services. These concerns remain unresolved.

Recent cases demonstrate the continued persistence of caste segregation and untouchability practices in India, including denial of temple entry, social boycotts, segregation in access to public resources, refusal of services and caste-based violence. In 2026, a 16-year-old Scheduled Caste boy in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, was reportedly assaulted for using a public handpump, after which the handpump was allegedly “purified” with Ganga water, reflecting continuing practices of ritual untouchability linked to access to water.³⁷ In Khargone district, Madhya Pradesh, Scheduled Castes families were denied access to a Hanuman temple and subsequently subjected to a social boycott restricting access to local shops.³⁸ In Karur district, Tamil Nadu, members of the Devendrakula Vellalar community protested denial of entry to a Mariamman temple festival by dominant caste groups.³⁹ In Karnataka, a statewide campaign was launched in response to the continuing refusal of barber services to Scheduled Castes under pressure from dominant castes, highlighting the persistence of occupational untouchability practices.⁴⁰ Contemporary scholarship further shows that notions of “purity” and “pollution” continue to shape everyday interactions and sustain exclusionary caste practices in social and public life.⁴¹

Water and Sanitation: Discrimination in Access to Public Services

Nearly a century after the Mahad Satyagraha (1927), led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to secure Scheduled Caste right to access public water sources, discrimination in access to water continues to persist. The denial of drinking water and other essential public services remains one of the continuing manifestations of caste-based exclusion faced by Scheduled Castes. Rather than being

³⁷ Siddiqui, F.R. (2026) Dalit minor thrashed, humiliated for drinking water at handpump. More info available <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kanpur/dalit-minor-thrashed-humiliated-for-drinking-water-at-handpump/articleshow/131160444.cms>

³⁸ Times News Network, (2026) Temple, shops reopened for Dalit Families in Khargone Village. More info available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/indore/temple-shops-reopened-for-dalit-families-in-khargone-village/article-show/130538855.cms>

³⁹ Times News Network, (2026) Dalits allege temple entry denial in Karur village, stage protest. More info available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/trichy/dalits-allege-temple-entry-denial-in-karur-village-stage-protest/article-show/130401547.cms>

⁴⁰ Menasinakai, S. (2026) Barbers community launches campaign against untouchability. More info available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hubballi/barbers-community-launches-campaign-against-untouchability/articleshow/129593087.cms>

⁴¹ Sihra, J. S. (2026). The odour of segregation. *International Sociology*, 41(1), 10-29.

a historical injustice, unequal access to water continues to affect the daily lives and dignity of Scheduled Caste communities.

In February 2026, residents of a Scheduled Caste settlement in Balangir district, Odisha, alleged that their electricity and piped water supply had been deliberately disconnected because of caste-based discrimination, leaving the settlement without essential public services.⁴² In May 2026, a Scheduled Caste family in Surendranagar district, Gujarat, was allegedly prevented from drawing water from a public well by dominant caste residents, leading to the registration of a case under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.⁴³ These incidents demonstrate that equal access to basic public services, particularly water, remains compromised by caste discrimination in many parts of India.

Political Participation and Limits to Democratic inclusion

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 17), The Committee recommends to the State Party to effectively enforce the reservation policy; to ensure the rights of members of scheduled castes and scheduled and other tribes to freely and safely vote and stand for election and to fully exercise their mandate if elected to their reserved seats. However, due to persistent implementation gaps and barriers the concern remains unresolved.

The political participation of Scheduled Castes reveals a fundamental contradiction within Indian democracy. Although the Constitution guarantees equality, voting rights, and political representation, entrenched caste hierarchies continue to impede Scheduled Caste communities from exercising meaningful political power. Constitutional provisions such as Articles 14, 15 and 17, along with reservation under the 73rd and 74th amendments, formally integrated Scheduled Castes into Democratic institutions through representation in Parliament, state assemblies and Panchayati Raj bodies. Yet representation has often remained symbolic rather than substantive. Studies on grassroots governance show that although reservation policies increased Scheduled Caste electoral participation, decision-making power frequently remains controlled by dominant caste groups. Many Scheduled Castes representatives, particularly in rural India, face intimidation, dependency and social exclusion, reducing their authority to tokenism. The distinction between political presence and actual power therefore remains crucial.⁴⁴ Research on the Scheduled Caste political participation in Punjab shows that although voter participation and political consciousness among Scheduled Castes have increased, caste hierarchy and economic

⁴² *The Times of India*, “Power, Water Supply Cut in Balangir Village Spurs Casteism Cry” (2025), available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/power-water-supply-cut-in-balangir-village-spurs-casteism-cry/articleshow/128435176.cms>.

⁴³ *ETV Bharat*, “Dalit Family Allegedly Boycotted, Denied Water from Public Well in Gujarat's Surendranagar” (2025), available at: <https://www.etvbharat.com/en/state/dalit-family-allegedly-boycotted-denied-water-from-public-well-in-gujarat-surendranagar-enn26051605515>

⁴⁴ Singh, K. (2023). The Changing Trajectory of Participation and Social Interaction at the Grassroots: Perception of Elected Dalit Representatives. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 9(2), 184-199.

dependence continue to prevent the emergence of autonomous political power.⁴⁵ Scheduled Castes women face a deeper form of exclusion shaped by both caste and patriarchy, where formal representation rarely translates into real authority due to caste prejudice, proxy control⁴⁶ and exclusion from decision-making.⁴⁷

Land and Livelihoods

The Committee, in its previous Concluding Observation, (Recommendation 20), recommended that the State Party guarantee land rights for Scheduled Castes, particularly Scheduled Caste women, and effectively enforce the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, in cases of land-related violence. This recommendation remains largely unimplemented.

Land and livelihood remain central to dignity, economic security, and social justice for Scheduled Caste communities in India. Despite constitutional safeguards, and land reform policies, Scheduled Castes continue to face denial of land ownership, illegal occupation of allotted land, eviction, caste-based violence, and exclusion from common resources. Recent cases from Punjab⁴⁸ ⁴⁹, Uttar Pradesh⁵⁰, Odisha⁵¹, Andhra Pradesh⁵², Tamil Nadu⁵³ and Delhi⁵⁴

⁴⁵Sahni, A., & Jagroop. (2022). Political Participation of Dalits in Punjab of the Twenty-first Century. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 14(2), 212-223.

⁴⁶ Mehrotra, I. (2019). Political Representation in Indian Democracy: A View from the Margins. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 5(1), 59-71

⁴⁷ Akhila, P. (2023). Voices and Perspectives of Dalit Elected Women Representatives in Local Governance and Politics in Kerala, India. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 15(1_suppl), S152-S165.

⁴⁸ Press Release (2025): PUDR Investigates the issue of the use of Panchayati Land by Dalits in Punjab. More info available at <https://www.pudr.org/press-statements/press-release-pudr-investigates-the-issue-of-the-use-panchayati-land-by-dalits-in-punjab/>

⁴⁹ Khanna, B. (2024), 2 years no auction land usurped: Patiala Dalits. More info available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/dalits-in-patiala-deprived-of-allocated-land-for-2-years/articleshow/112480080.cms>

⁵⁰ Singh, R. (2025) 41 houses get eviction notice in Up's Hapur, many built under PMAY. More info available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/41-houses-get-eviction-notice-in-ups-hapur-many-built-under-pmay/articleshow/120308837.cms>

⁵¹ Parida, A. (2025) Evicted sans rehabilitation, 20 families find refuge in burial ground in Odisha. More info available at <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2025/Feb/13/evicted-sans-rehabilitation-20-families-find-refuge-in-burial-ground-in-odisha>

⁵² Times News Network, (2024) Dalit Man, Kin attacked over land issues. More info available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/vijayawada/dalit-man-kin-attacked-over-land-issues/articleshow/107065318.cms>

⁵³ Express News Service, (2025) NCSC chief visits Dalit Man attacked for flagging Panchami land encroachment in TN. More info available at <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2025/Dec/02/ncsc-chief-visits-dalit-man-attacked-for-flagging-panchami-land-encroachment-in-tn>

⁵⁴ Mathur, A. (2024) LG Cancels DUSIB eviction notice on school land, AAP says punish officials. More info available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/lg-cancels-dusib-eviction-notice-on-school-land-aap-says-punish-officials/articleshow/113302254.cms>

reveal persistent of discrimination and displacement. The families from Scheduled Castes have been denied access to legally reserved Panchayati land, threatened with eviction from government approved housing, violently attacked during land disputes, and displaced without rehabilitation. Conflicts over Panchami land in Tamil Nadu and reserved village land in Punjab further highlight how caste power structures continue to restrict Scheduled Castes' access to land and livelihoods. Academic research also shows that unequal land ownership⁵⁵ ⁵⁶, failed land reforms⁵⁷, and caste-based exclusion in both rural and urban economies⁵⁸ reinenforce long-term social and economic marginalisation.

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Education: In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 25), the Committee urged the State Party to reduce dropout rates and improve enrolment of Dalit children through scholarships, measures to eliminate classroom segregation and discrimination, equitable access to the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and improved access to quality education for Dalit and tribal students.

Constitutional safeguards and reservation policies have not eliminated caste-based discrimination in educational institutions. Many Scheduled Caste students continue to experience segregation, harassment, and exclusion, resulting in psychological distress, higher dropout rates, and student suicides, especially in higher education.⁵⁹ ⁶⁰ Reported campus incidents of caste discrimination increased by 118.4% between 2019 and 2024.⁶¹ The case of Rohith Vemula exposed institutional harassment and social exclusion can create hostile campus environment⁶². Similar concerns have

⁵⁵ Kumar, A., & Navjot. Landlessness and Marginalisation among Dalits in Rural Punjab. *South Asia Research*, 02627280261427066.

⁵⁶ Mehra, A. (2023). The Bir Sunarwala: An uncharted Dalit Land Movement of Haryana, India. *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, 4(2), 185-195.

⁵⁷ Yadu, C. R., & Vijayasuryan, C. K. (2016). Triple exclusion of Dalits in land ownership in Kerala. *Social Change*, 46(3), 393-408.

⁵⁸ Upadhya, C. (2021). Recasting Land: Agrarian Urbanism in Amaravati. *Urbanisation*, 6(1), 82-103.

⁵⁹ Kumar, A. (2025). Unequal spaces: An in-depth analysis of caste discrimination in Indian Universities. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 22(2), 200-221

⁶⁰ Rathod, B. (2019). Caste conflicts on campuses: Examining diversity research to transform Indian universities into inclusive learning spaces. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 5(2), 129-146.

⁶¹ *The Wire*, "Caste-Based Discrimination Up by 118% in Universities, UGC Data Shows" (2024), available at: <https://thewire.in/caste/caste-based-discrimination-up-by-118-in-universities-ugc-data-shows>

⁶² Deepak, P. (2026) Rohit Vemula law will end caste bias in Edu institutes. More info available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/rohith-vemula-law-will-end-caste-bias-in-edu-institutes/articleshow/126625108.cms>

emerged in IITs⁶³, Medical colleges⁶⁴ ⁶⁵and Central universities⁶⁶ ⁶⁷ where cases like Rohith Vemula, Darshan Solanki⁶⁸, and Payal Tadvi⁶⁹ highlighted the link between caste discrimination, academic pressure and student suicides.

The National statistical office reported significant rural-urban and socio-economic gaps in internet access and device ownership among marginalised households.⁷⁰ Educational surveys also reveal poor digital infrastructure in schools. The ministry of UDISE+ report 2021-22 found that only a limited proportion of schools had internet access and functional computers, with rural and poorer regions facing the greatest shortages.⁷¹ The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these disparities widening educational gaps and increasing dropout risks among poor and rural students. In 2024, the proportion of Std III children in government schools across India who could read a Std II-level text increased to 23.4%, up from 16.3% in 2022. This recovery surpassed that observed in private schools, with all states reporting improvements following the decline seen in 2022. However, even with this progress, the fact that only 23.4% of Std III children can read a Std II-level text highlights the continued need to strengthen the quality of education and foundational literacy among young learners.⁷² Studies by UNICEF⁷³ found that many students from marginalised communities lacked smartphones, stable internet connections, or private learning spaces, forcing them to share devices or discontinue learning together. The

⁶³ Handa, A. (2023). 1 out of 3 SC/ST students asked about their caste: IIT Bombay 2022 survey. More info available at

<https://www.thequint.com/news/education/darshan-solanki-suicide-case-dalit-student-death-iit-bombay-caste-discrimination-sc-st-survey-education-latest-news>

⁶⁴ Mukul, A. (2012) Probe finds discrimination against SC/ST students in Delhi medical college. More info available at

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/probe-finds-discrimination-against-sc/st-students-in-delhi-medical-college/articleshow/16521598.cms>

⁶⁵ Kumar, R. V., & Admankar, M. (2024). Caste and medical education: exclusion of Dalit and Tribal students in state medical colleges in five states in India.

⁶⁶ The Wire, (2026) caste-based discrimination up by 118% in universities, UGC data shows. More info available at <https://thewire.in/caste/caste-based-discrimination-up-by-118-in-universities-ugc-data-shows>

⁶⁷ Jha, M. (2026). Castelessness. India's favourite lie. More info available at <https://frontline.thehindu.com/social-issues/social-justice/caste-denial-indian-college-campuses/article70610794.ace>

⁶⁸ Press Trust of India, (2023) IIT Bombay student suicide: Darshan Solanki told his mother about caste discrimination. More info available at

<https://news.careers360.com/iit-bombay-student-suicide-darshan-solanki-told-his-mother-about-caste-discrimination>

⁶⁹ Sharma, S. (2019). Seniors humiliated her on WhatsApp: Husband of doctor who killed self. More info available at

<https://www.ndtv.com/mumbai-news/seniors-humiliated-payal-tadvi-on-whatsapp-husband-of-doctor-who-killed-self-2044205>

⁷⁰ National Statistical Office (NSO). *Household Social Consumption on Education in India* (2019). More info available at https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Report_585_75th_round_Education_final_1507

⁷¹ Ministry of Education, Government of India. *UDISE+ Report 2021–22*. More info available at https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/statistics/report_in_PDF/udise_21_22.pdf

⁷² ASER Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2024, more info available at https://asercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ASER_2024_Final-Report_13_2_24.pdf

⁷³ UNICEF (2021). Covid 19 and school closures: one year of education disruption. More info available at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/one-year-of-covid-19-and-school-closures/>

growing privatisation and commercialisation of education has also reduced access to higher education, largely benefitting upper caste and economically privileged groups.⁷⁴ Many private institutions either fall outside reservation mandates or implement them poorly, reducing opportunities for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Communities students.

Employment and Labour: Scheduled Castes remain concentrated in low-paying and insecure jobs due to discriminatory hiring practices and caste-based social networks⁷⁵ wage discrimination against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes also persists in the private sector despite similar educational qualifications.⁷⁶ ⁷⁷ Scheduled Castes remain overrepresented in stigmatised and hazardous occupations such as sanitation work, manual scavenging, construction, and casual labour.⁷⁸

According to the Global Slavery index 2018, there are various estimates of employment in the brick kiln industry in India, ranging from 2.1 million workers (as per NSS Round 68 2011-12) to over 10 million workers.⁷⁹ The National Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Hub (NSSH), launched in 2016 and implemented by the National Small Industry Corporation (NSIC), promotes SC/ST entrepreneurship by improving access to finance, technology, markets and skills. Its initiative includes a 25% capital subsidy (up to Rs. 25 lakh) for eligible SC/ST MSEs. Since inception the hub has supported over 1.59 lakh entrepreneurs and helped increase public procurement from SC/ST enterprises from Rs. 99.37 Crore (0.07%) in 2015-16 to Rs. 3,731.50 Crore (1.73%) in 2024-25.⁸⁰

Shrinking Civic Space and Safety of Dalit Human Rights Defenders

Civil society organizations, journalists, academics, and human rights defenders play a central role in documenting caste discrimination, monitoring implementation of constitutional safeguards, and supporting Scheduled Caste communities in accessing justice. However, civic space in India has significantly narrowed in recent years through increasing restrictions on funding, criminalization of dissent, arrests under anti-terror and sedition laws, online harassment, and intimidation of rights defenders. According to *The State of Shrinking Civic Space in India*

⁷⁴ Jamkar, V. & Johnstone, C. (2021). Privatization and Unequal Access in India. More info available at <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ihe/article/view/14545/10959>

⁷⁵ Banerjee, B., & Knight, J. B. (1985). Caste discrimination in the Indian urban labour market. *Journal of Development Economics*, 17(3), 277-307.

⁷⁶ Thorat, S., & Attewell, P. (2007). The legacy of social exclusion: A correspondence study of job discrimination in India. *Economic and political weekly*, 4141-4145.

⁷⁷ Axmann, N., Swanson, K., & Contreras, V. C. (2016). Caste and religion-based wage discrimination in the Indian private sector: Evidence from the Indian Human Development Survey. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 43(2), 165-175.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch, (2014). More info available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/25/cleaning-human-waste/manual-scavenging-caste-and-discrimination-india>

⁷⁹ GFod, infographics. More info available at <https://globalforumcdwd.org/infographics-3/>

⁸⁰ Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Annual Report 2025-26, more info available at <https://www.msme.gov.in/static/uploads/2026/05/1bfda06b460e72543530b40817573495.pdf>

2021 by the Asian Centre for Human Rights, the Government of India cancelled more than 20,600 NGO licenses under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) between 2010 and 2021, including many Dalit rights organisations. Dalit rights groups have raised concerns that the use of FCRA restrictions has disproportionately affected organizations working on issues concerning marginalized communities, minorities, caste discrimination, and human rights accountability.⁸¹

Dalit human rights defenders continue to face intimidation, arrests, violence, and prolonged criminal proceedings for their work on caste atrocities, land rights, and state accountability. One of the most significant examples remains the Bhima Koregaon/Elgar Parishad case, in which 16 lawyers, academics, writers, and human rights defenders were arrested under anti-terror legislation following violence during the 200th anniversary commemoration of the Battle of Bhima Koregaon on 1 January 2018. Those arrested included Anand Teltumbde, an internationally known Scheduled Caste scholar and public intellectual who has extensively written on caste violence; Sudhir Dhawale, a grassroots Dalit rights activist and organizer and Father Stan Swamy, an 84-year-old Jesuit priest who spent decades defending Adivasi land and forest rights in Jharkhand. Father Stan Swamy died in judicial custody in July 2021 after repeatedly being denied adequate medical care and bail despite his deteriorating health and Parkinson's disease, raising serious international concerns regarding treatment of elderly human rights defenders in detention.⁸²

Business and Human Rights

Caste-based inequalities contribute to bonded labour, child labour, and exploitation in supply chains, creating major ethical and legal concerns for multinational corporations in India.⁸³ Caste discrimination is often overlooked as a root cause of labor rights violations, with limited corporate awareness, weak risk assessments and little engagement with affected workers or civil society, undermining effective due diligence.⁸⁴ Studies from Tamil Nadu show that Scheduled Caste contractors face lower earnings, unstable leadership, restricted mobility, and weaker employer networks than upper-caste contractors, limiting economic mobility.⁸⁵ Young Scheduled Caste women and girls in the garment and textile industries are frequently subjected to

⁸¹ Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR), *The State of Shrinking Civic Space in India Report 2022*, available at:

https://iwgja.org/doclink/achr-state-of-shrinking-civil-space-india-report-2022-eng/eyJ0eXAiOiJKV1QiLCJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJzdWUiOiJhY2hyLXN0YXRILW9mLXNocmlua2luZy1jaXZpbC1zcGFjZS1pbmRpYS1yZXBvenQtMjAyMi1lbmciLCJpYXQiOiJlbnQyODc4OTUsImV4cCI6MTY1NDM3NDI1NX0.E4_tXvDwE-ZlQxMelcPaT-0BVUA0lo7UowNs5gfBqmE

⁸² Front Line Defenders, *India: Dalit Human Rights Defenders Facing Threats and Violence* (n.d.), available at: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/fr/node/7418>

⁸³ Badigannavar, V., Kelly, J., & Tiwary, M. (2020, July). Does caste matter when doing business in India? Socio-legal and economic perspectives. *Academy of International Business (AIB) Conference 2020*.

⁸⁴ ARISA, Issues Discrimination. More info available at <https://arisa.nl/en/issues-discrimination/>

⁸⁵ Soundararajan, V., Sharma, G., & Bapuji, H. (2024). Caste, social capital and precarity of labour market intermediaries: The case of Dalit labour contractors in India. *Organization Studies*, 45(7), 961-985.

exploitative recruitment, low wages, excessive working hours, restricted freedom, and conditions resembling bonded labour while producing for global brands.^{86 87} In rural North India, caste discrimination primarily restricts access to employment rather than wages, reducing the effectiveness of reservation policies.⁸⁸ Caste-based discrimination also traps marginalised communities in precarious stone and granite industries characterised by debt bondage, unsafe conditions, informal employment, child labour, and weak labour protections.^{89 90 91} Emerging forms of gig and contract work continue to reproduce caste-based inequalities through insecure employment, social exclusion, and discrimination, disproportionately affecting marginalised workers.^{92 93}

Humanitarian Contexts, Climate Justice and Disaster Response

Existing social hierarchies shape exposure to environmental risks, access to disaster assistance, and recovery outcomes. Land dispossession, development-induced displacement, and unequal resource access disproportionately affect women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes, yet climate and disaster policies rarely adopt an intersectional approach.⁹⁴ Marginalised communities, particularly poorer and lower-caste groups, frequently face discrimination during rescue, relief, and rehabilitation.⁹⁵ In drought-prone regions, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes experience greater food insecurity, livelihood loss, migration, and limited access to state

⁸⁶ Oonk, G., Overeem P., Peepercamp, M., & Theuws, M. (2012). Maid in India Young Dalit Women Continue to Suffer Exploitative Conditions in India's Garment Industry. More info available at <https://arisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/Maid-in-India-Young-Dalit-Women-exploitation-India-Garments-Industry.pdf>

⁸⁷ Coninck, N. (ICN), Theuws, M. & Overeem, P. (SOMO), (2011). Captured by Cotton Exploited Dalit girls produce garments in India for European and US markets. More info available at <https://arisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/Captured-by-Cotton.pdf>

⁸⁸ Ito, T. (2009). Caste discrimination and transaction costs in the labor market: Evidence from rural North India. *Journal of Development Economics*, 88(2), 292-300.

⁸⁹ ARISA, (2024), Caste in Stone Employment and working conditions in the Rajasthan sandstone and marble supply chains – a caste perspective, More info available at https://arisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/Caste-in-stone_November-2024.pdf

⁹⁰ Ray, P. & Peepercamp, M. (2018). Labour without Liberty: Female Migrant workers in Bangalore's Garment Industry. More info available at <https://arisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/LabourWithoutLiberty.pdf>

⁹¹ Global Research (Hyderabad), India Committee of the Netherlands (Utrecht) & Stop Child Labour (The Hague) (2017). The Dark Sites of Granite Modern slavery, child labour and unsafe work in Indian granite quarries - What should companies do? More Info available at <https://arisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/TheDarkSitesOfGranite.pdf>

⁹² Banerjee, D. (2024). Caste, gig-economy, and youth: The resurgence of a new age caste politics in urban Gujarat. *South Asian History and Culture*, 15(2), 231-246.

⁹³ Khatoon, A. (2024). Caste Disparity, fear of Violence & no family time-Survey puts numbers to gig workers troubles. The Print. More info available at <https://theprint.in/india/caste-disparity-fear-of-violence-no-family-time-survey-puts-numbers-to-gig-workers-troubles/1997671/>

⁹⁴ Bandy, M. U. L., & Dixit, A. (2024). Organised dispossession and development as disaster: analysing caste and gender in disaster policymaking. *Gender & Development*, 32(3), 663-683.

⁹⁵ Jha, M. K. (2015). Liquid disaster and frigid response: Disaster and social exclusion. *International Social Work*, 58(5), 704-716.

support in spite of government interventions.⁹⁶ Floods in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, and other regions similarly reveal caste-based exclusion from relief, compensation, housing, and recovery programmes, reinforcing existing inequalities.⁹⁷ ⁹⁸ These examples show that disasters often deepen structural injustices, while climate policies continue to overlook the specific vulnerabilities of historically marginalised communities, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to climate justice and disaster governance.⁹⁹

ARTICLE 6

Judiciary Response

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 25), the Committee urged the State Party to strengthen the effectiveness of the judiciary, ensure prompt prosecution of caste-based offences, improve access to justice for Scheduled Castes, and address delays in the administration of justice. Despite these recommendations, judicial responses to caste atrocities continue to be marked by significant delays, high pendency rates, low conviction rates, and weak institutional capacity.

Although the SC/ST (PoA) Act provides for Special Courts to ensure speedy trial of offences, several states continue to rely primarily on designated Sessions Courts rather than establishing Exclusive Special Courts with dedicated judges, prosecutors and infrastructure. Similarly, Special Public Prosecutors are frequently designated in addition to their regular responsibilities instead of being appointed exclusively for atrocity cases.

Judicial outcomes continue to reflect serious implementation failures. According to NCRB 2024, the court pendency rate for crimes against Scheduled Castes stood at 94.4%, while the conviction rate was only 33.9%, indicating that the overwhelming majority of cases remain unresolved for prolonged periods. Even in states where the number of Special Courts has increased, judicial outcomes remain poor. These figures demonstrate that merely designating courts or expanding judicial infrastructure has not translated into timely or effective justice. Persistent delays, inadequate investigations, weak prosecution, limited witness protection, insufficient legal aid,

⁹⁶ National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, (2022), Droughts, Dalits & Adivasis: A Study on the Impact of Droughts catalysed by Climate Change on the Dalits and the Adivasis of Marathwada region of Maharashtra. More info available at <https://www.ncdhr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NCDHR-Drought-Report-low-res.pdf>

⁹⁷ National Dalit Watch, NCDHR. “The Excluded in Relief and Rehabilitation” Survey of post-flood situation of Dalit victims’ access to relief and rehabilitation in Andhra Pradesh floods of 2009. More info available at https://prod-qt-images.s3.amazonaws.com/indiawaterportal/import/sites/default/files/iwp2/the_excluded_in_disaster_reliefrehabilitation_ap_floods_2007.pdf

⁹⁸ National Dalit Watch, NCDHR (2010). Exclusion of Dalits in the Flood Rehabilitation Bijapur district, Karnataka. More info available at <https://docslib.org/doc/7273719/exclusion-of-dalits-in-the-flood-rehabilitation-in-bijapur-district-karnataka>

⁹⁹ National Dalit Watch, NCDHR. Caste discrimination in disaster situations in India. More info available at <https://www.indiawaterportal.org/climate-change/disasters/caste-discrimination-disaster-situations-india-reports-national-dalit-watch>

and the continued reliance on designated rather than Exclusive Special Courts significantly undermine the effective implementation of the SC/ST (PoA) Act and the Committee's previous recommendations.

Caste Discrimination Within the Criminal Justice System

Concerns regarding access to justice extend beyond the treatment of Scheduled Castes as victims of atrocities. Recent judicial interventions have exposed continuing caste discrimination within the criminal justice system itself. In *Sukanya Shantha v. Union of India* (2024), the Supreme Court struck down prison manual provisions that assigned cleaning and sanitation work to prisoners based on caste and permitted caste-based segregation within prisons, holding such practices to be unconstitutional.¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding these directions, several States and Union Territories failed to submit compliance reports within the prescribed timeframe, raising concerns regarding implementation. Similarly, in 2026, the Supreme Court quashed bail conditions imposed on Scheduled Castes accused persons in Odisha that required them to perform cleaning-related tasks, describing such conditions as degrading and discriminatory.¹⁰¹ These cases demonstrate that caste prejudice continues to influence the functioning of institutions responsible for administering justice.

Restrictive Judicial Interpretation of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act

Although the protective framework established under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, judicial interpretation in several cases has narrowed the scope of protection available to victims of caste-based violence and discrimination. In *Hitesh Verma v. State of Uttarakhand*, the Supreme Court held that for offenses under Sections 3(1)(r) and 3(1)(s) of the SC/ST (PoA) Act to be attracted, caste-based insults or intimidation must occur “within public view” and must be specifically linked to caste-based humiliation. The judgment has subsequently been relied upon in multiple cases to narrow the Act's applicability and to quash proceedings at the preliminary stage.¹⁰²

More recently, the Supreme Court reiterated that caste-based abuses made within a private residence and outside public view would not attract offences under the SC/ST (PoA) Act. These interpretations risk excluding significant forms of caste-based humiliation and discrimination

¹⁰⁰ *Sukanya Shantha v. Union of India & Ors.*, 2024 INSC 753, Supreme Court of India, Judgment dated 3 October 2024, available at:

https://api.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2023/51059/51059_2023_1_1502_56228_Judgement_03-Oct-2024.pdf

¹⁰¹ *The Times of India*, “Clean Thana, Bail Condition for Tribals, Dalits Degrading: Supreme Court” (2025), available

at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/clean-thana-bail-condition-for-tribals-dalits-degrading-supreme-court/articleshow/130814288.cms>

¹⁰² Indian Kanoon, *Hitesh Verma vs The State of Utrakhand*, available at: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/111507500/>.

that frequently occur within private, residential, and socially controlled spaces, particularly in rural and caste-segregated settings.¹⁰³

Concerns regarding judicial dilution of the SC/ST (PoA) Act intensified following the Supreme Court's decision in *Dr. Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra* (2018), where the Court introduced procedural safeguards, including preliminary inquiry before arrest and prior approval requirements in certain cases involving public servants.¹⁰⁴ The judgment was widely criticized by Dalit rights activists, scholars, and civil society groups for weakening the immediate protective framework of the Act and creating additional barriers for victims seeking redress against caste-based violence and discrimination. Restrictive judicial approaches to the SC/ST (PoA) Act often undermine its remedial purpose by imposing heightened evidentiary burdens and narrowly interpreting its provisions. Such approaches contribute to delays in trials, increasing the likelihood of witness intimidation, hostile testimony, interference with evidence, and eventual acquittals.

Data and Accountability Gaps

Significant data and accountability gaps continue to undermine efforts to monitor and address caste discrimination in India. Existing mechanisms primarily record registered criminal offences, while widespread practices such as untouchability, segregation, social boycott, and everyday caste discrimination remain largely undocumented. India also lacks comprehensive caste-disaggregated data on representation in the higher judiciary, private sector, corporate leadership, media, and emerging technology sectors, with no mandatory framework for caste diversity reporting. Although India has improved its global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ranking, aggregate indicators continue to mask persistent inequalities faced by Scheduled Castes in access to education, employment, healthcare, justice, and dignity.¹⁰⁵

Budget Accountability

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 9), the Committee urged the State Party should also provide disaggregated data on the percentages of the Union, State and district budgets allocated for that purpose and on the effects of such measures on the enjoyment by members of scheduled castes and scheduled and other tribes of the rights guaranteed by the Convention. However, this concern has not been fully resolved.

¹⁰³ *The Times of India*, "Casteist Slurs Inside a Private House Not an Offence Under SC/ST Act, Says Supreme Court" (2025), available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/legal/news/casteist-slurs-inside-a-private-house-not-an-offence-under-sc/st-act-says-supreme-court/articleshow/131030601.cms>

¹⁰⁴ Indian Kanoon, *Dr. Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra*, available at: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/108728085/>

¹⁰⁵ *The Mooknayak*, "Why India Cannot Achieve the SDGs Without Including Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent" (2024), available at: <https://en.themooknayak.com/discussion-interview/why-india-cannot-achieve-the-sdgs-without-including-communities-discriminated-on-work-and-descent>

For years Scheduled Caste rights groups have been closely examining the Union budget in India to assess whether it adequately addresses the specific needs of these communities, particularly in terms of resource allocation and effective implementation. They have consistently raised the concerns about whether funds earmarked for welfare schemes actually reach the intended beneficiaries and whether public spending reflects principles of social justice. Although most economists view capital expenditure as caste, class and gender-neutral, some argue that infrastructure and development projects can be structured in ways that directly benefit historically marginalized communities.¹⁰⁶ A recent analysis reveals that despite higher allocations for SCs in the FY 2026-27, Rs. 196,400.37 Cr was reached, representing 11.85% of total Central Schemes (CS) + Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and a 16.6% increase from the previous year; however, this increase is largely cosmetic. Most funds remain tied to general schemes instead of targeted interventions for marginalized communities. Out of hundreds of schemes under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe budgets, only a handful are exclusively focused on these groups, exposing massive funding gaps. Meanwhile crucial schemes such as Scholarships for Higher Education for Young Achievers (SHREYAS) scholarships, the National Safai Karmacharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)-URBAN 2.0 and free coaching initiatives continue to suffer from chronic underfunding, raising serious concerns about the budget's real impact on social justice and community development. Budget credibility is not shaped by allocations alone, but by actual utilisation. Even after reforms such as the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), Single Nodal Agency Samyochit Pranali Ekikrit Shighra Hastantaran (SNA SPARSH), Treasury Single Account (TSA) and Reserve Bank of India's e-Kuber to improve transparency and real-time tracking, large gaps between Budget Estimates and Actual Expenditure persist.

Representation in Public Institutions

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 17), the Committee urged the State Party to effectively enforce the reservation policy, extend reservation to the judiciary, ensure adequate representation of Scheduled Castes in Union, State and local governments and public services, and provide updated statistical data on such representation. Although the Constitution guarantees reservation for Scheduled Castes in public employment and educational institutions,¹⁰⁷ These recommendations remain inadequately implemented, particularly in senior decision-making positions within the judiciary, civil services and police administration.

¹⁰⁶ Phadnis, A. (2025), The Changing Face of the Dalits: Budget as a catalyst for empowerment. *Business Standard*. More info available at https://www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/the-changing-face-of-the-dalits-budget-as-a-catalyst-for-empowerment-125013101836_1.html

¹⁰⁷ Scheduled Castes constitute 16.6% of India's population and are entitled to 15% reservation in public employment and educational institutions. However, as government employment constitutes less than 5% of total employment in India, the impact of reservation remains limited, particularly in the absence of affirmative action in the private sector.

In March 2026, the Government informed Parliament out of 849 High Court Judges appointed since 2018, 33 belong to Scheduled Caste category (3.9%), while also acknowledging that caste-wise data concerning serving judges is not maintained centrally.¹⁰⁸ This lack of transparency itself reflects a significant accountability gap concerning diversity within the higher judiciary. Despite more than seven decades of constitutional governance, only two persons from the Scheduled Caste community have served as Chief Justice of India: Justice K.G. Balakrishnan (2007–2010) and Justice B.R. Gavai (2025).

Government data indicates that among the 5,577 serving IAS officers, only 135 officers (2.42%) belong to Scheduled Castes. Similarly, of the 4,594 serving IPS officers, only 141 officers (3.06%) are from Scheduled Castes, while in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), Scheduled Castes constitute only 95 officers (4.39%) out of a total cadre strength of 2,164 officers. These figures remain significantly below the constitutionally mandated reservation of 15% for Scheduled Castes, highlighting persistent barriers to equitable representation in senior decision-making and leadership positions within the Indian state apparatus.¹⁰⁹

Performance and Effectiveness of Accountability Institutions (NCSC, NHRC, and Others)

India's accountability institutions, particularly the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), play an important role in promoting transparency, constitutional governance, and rights protection. The NHRC has contributed to addressing custodial violence, prison conditions, communal violence, and the rights of vulnerable groups, but its effectiveness is constrained by non-binding recommendations, limited jurisdiction, executive influence, and reliance on government cooperation.¹¹⁰ The NCSC monitors constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes, oversees reservation policies, investigates caste discrimination, and advises on policy.^{111 112 113} However, weak enforcement powers, reporting delays, continuing atrocities, and dependence on executive agencies limit its effectiveness in ensuring accountability and protecting Scheduled Castes.^{114 115 116 117}

¹⁰⁸ Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3525, answered on 18 December 2023, Annexure, available at: https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabhaquestions/annex/187/AU3525_NhXUHC.pdf?source=pqals.

¹⁰⁹ Press Information Bureau, *Representation of SCs, STs and OBCs in Central Government Services* (2025), Government of India, available at: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2226914®=3&lang=2>

¹¹⁰ Singh, U.K. (2018). *The 'Inside–Outside' Body: National Human Rights Commission of India*. Economic and Political Weekly, 53(5), 33–39.

¹¹¹ National Commission for Scheduled Castes. (2023). *Annual Report 2022–23*.

¹¹² Constitution of India, Article 338.

¹¹³ Ibid 131

¹¹⁴ Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's silent revolution: the rise of the lower castes in North India*. Orient Blackswan.

¹¹⁵ Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment. (2022). *Report on Demands for Grants*.

¹¹⁶ National Crime Records Bureau. (2023). *Crime in India 2022*.

¹¹⁷ Mendelsohn, O., & Vicziany, M. (1998). *The untouchables: Subordination, poverty and the state in modern India* (Vol. 4). Cambridge University Press.

Health Inequalities and Access to Public Health Services

In Recommendation 24 of its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19), the Committee called on the State Party to improve access to quality healthcare for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In spite of various government initiatives, significant gaps remain.

Significant health inequalities continue to affect Scheduled Castes despite improvements in national health indicators. According to NFHS-5, anaemia affected 59.2% of Scheduled Caste women aged 15–49 years, exceeding the national average of 57.0%. Anaemia among Scheduled Caste children aged 6–59 months stood at 69.5%, reflecting persistent nutritional deprivation and adverse health conditions among Scheduled Caste communities.¹¹⁸

Health disparities begin early in life and continue across generations. NFHS-5 data shows that the under-five mortality rate among Scheduled Castes was 49 deaths per 1,000 live births, significantly higher than the rate of 33 deaths per 1,000 live births among communities outside the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Communities categories. Similarly, neonatal mortality among Scheduled Castes stood at 29 deaths per 1,000 live births compared to 20 among the general population.¹¹⁹ These disparities indicate that caste continues to shape health outcomes from birth onwards. Despite these gaps, comprehensive caste-disaggregated data concerning maternal mortality, mental health impacts of caste discrimination, including caste trauma and its impact on Scheduled Caste students and survivors of caste discrimination, healthcare access and experiences of discrimination within public health institutions remains limited, constraining effective monitoring and accountability.

Article 7

Change in Curriculum

In its previous Concluding Observations (CERD/C/IND/CO/19, Recommendation 27), The Committee advises the State Party to enhance efforts against caste-based discrimination and ethnic prejudice through public education, awareness campaigns, and the inclusion of inter-caste tolerance objectives in the National Curriculum Framework. However, this concern has not been fully resolved.

Socioeconomic and caste hierarchies have long influenced India's education system¹²⁰, affecting educational quality, particularly among marginalised people. Although significant improvements

¹¹⁸ Lok Sabha Secretariat, *Unstarred Question No. 3525 on Representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes in Civil Services* (2025), Government of India, available at: https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabhaquestions/annex/187/AU3525_NhXUHC.pdf?source=pqals

¹¹⁹ International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019–21* (2021), available at: <https://www.nfhsiips.in/nfhsuser/publication.php>

¹²⁰ Deka, P. P. (2015). Indian caste hierarchy system and education. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 2(9), 539-542.

have been made, inequities remain. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strives to improve education in these communities, and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 is a crucial project. NCFSE 2023 introduces a new 5+3+3+4 educational structure that reflects children's developmental stages and promotes interdisciplinary learning (Ministry of Education, 2023). It prioritises digital education, basic literacy, vocational training, and multilingual education, addressing gaps based on location, religion, caste, and language. However, the curriculum has historically served as a site of exclusion for Scheduled Castes communities while also holding the potential for social transformation. The NCF 2005 introduced a significant shift by endorsing a critical engagement with caste, promoting a “critical and empathic” understanding of caste issues and discussions around inequality and social justice. However, scholarly work indicates that the implementation of this framework in classrooms has been inconsistent.¹²¹ Recent NCERT curriculum revisions, including content rationalization, reframing of narratives, and competency-based learning, have sparked debate due to removal of topics related to social movements, caste, and Dalit voices.^{122 123} Research indicates that Dalit histories are often omitted from textbooks, which marginalizes their contributions and identities.¹²⁴ This absence weakens representation and self-identity among Scheduled Caste students and contributes to the erasure and distortion of Dalit histories, identities and cultural narratives.

Recommendations

1. The Committee should recommend that the State Party withdraw its longstanding position that caste falls outside the scope of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and recognize caste-based discrimination as a form of descent-based discrimination in accordance with Article 1 of the Convention and CERD General Recommendation No. 29.
2. The Committee should urge the State Party to develop comprehensive caste-disaggregated indicators aligned with its human rights obligations and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), systematically collect and publish disaggregated data across all sectors, and provide comprehensive caste-disaggregated information in its future periodic reports to the Committee concerning the situation of Scheduled Castes and measures adopted to eliminate caste-based discrimination. The committee should

¹²¹ Mittal, D. (2020). Engaging with ‘caste’: Curriculum, pedagogy and reception. *Space and Culture, India*, 8(1), 101-110.

¹²² Banerjee, R. (2023). On the Recent Change Made by NCERT in School Textbooks- Two Articles. *Janata Weekly*. Accessed on 5 May 2026 from <https://janataweekly.org/on-the-recent-changes-made-by-ncert-in-school-textbooks-two-articles/>

¹²³ Gadate, S. (2021). How Textbooks Sanitise Slavery, Make Caste Invisible. Accessed on 5 May 2026 from <https://www.newsclick.in/how-textbooks-sanitise-slavery-caste-invisible>

¹²⁴ Sonker, S., Gaur, B., & Singh, L. (2023). Exclusion of contributions of Dalit’s and other marginalized communities from Indian history: A systematic review and sociological analysis of Indian curriculum. *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 14(4), 207-214.

urge the state party to use the 'citizen data' methodology developed by the UN Statistical Commission and facilitate communities to gather community specific data to fill data gaps for tracking SDG progress.¹²⁵

3. The Committee should recommend that the State Party ensure mandatory human rights and anti-caste sensitization training for police, members of the judiciary, prosecutors, teachers, healthcare workers and other public officials, accompanied by measurable accountability mechanisms to address discriminatory conduct.
4. The Committee should urge the State Party to strengthen implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 by establishing an independent review and accountability mechanism, ensuring compliance with statutory obligations relating to timely investigations, victim compensation, legal aid, travel and maintenance allowances, rehabilitation and witness protection, and requiring all State Governments to publish complete, standardized and regularly updated implementation data, including action taken against negligent public officials.
5. The Committee should recommend that the State Party ensure effective protection of Dalit human rights defenders, journalists, researchers, community leaders and civil society organizations from intimidation, violence, reprisals and arbitrary criminalization, refrain from the misuse of anti-terror, national security and financial regulation laws against them, and provide detailed information on such incidents and measures taken to ensure accountability in its future reports to the Committee.
6. The Committee should recommend that the State Party conduct confidential village-level surveys and periodic social audits in high-prevalence regions to identify hidden forms of caste-based discrimination and exploitation, including Devadasi/Jogini practices, bonded labour, child labour and manual scavenging, while ensuring protection of survivors and whistleblowers from retaliation.
7. The Committee should recommend that the State Party adopt and implement caste-responsive and intersectional disaster and climate policies that ensure equitable access to relief, rehabilitation, compensation and climate adaptation measures for Scheduled Castes, while guaranteeing their meaningful participation, particularly that of Scheduled Caste women, in disaster preparedness, climate decision-making and recovery processes.
8. The Committee should recommend that the State Party adopt an intersectional approach to eliminate caste discrimination, supported by targeted measures, disaggregated data and accountability mechanisms for Scheduled Caste women and girls, persons with disabilities, transgender persons and LGBTQIA+ persons.

¹²⁵ <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/citizen-data/>

9. The Committee should recommend that the State Party eliminate caste-based discrimination and occupational segregation in employment by enforcing mandatory caste-sensitive human rights due diligence across public and private sectors, including business operations, supply chains, informal employment and digital labour platforms, and by addressing bonded labour, child labour, manual scavenging, hereditary sanitation work and exploitative recruitment practices, consistent with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
10. The Committee should recommend that the State Party eliminate caste-based discrimination and digital exclusion in education by ensuring equitable access to quality education, strengthening public educational infrastructure, hostels and digital infrastructure, effectively implementing reservation policies, establishing accessible grievance redress mechanisms, and strengthening accountability for discrimination, harassment and exclusion within educational institutions.
11. The Committee should recommend that the State Party ensure the effective and substantive political participation of Scheduled Castes, particularly women, by preventing caste-based intimidation, discrimination and proxy control against elected representatives at all levels of governance.
12. The Committee should recommend that the State Party strengthen transparency, accountability and community participation in Scheduled Caste budget allocations by ensuring targeted budgeting, adequate allocations, full and timely utilization of funds, real-time expenditure tracking, mandatory public disclosure of utilization data, and independent social audits to ensure that welfare resources effectively reach Scheduled Caste communities.
13. The Committee should recommend that the State Party establish periodic independent institutional audits across public institutions to identify structural caste discrimination, assess compliance with constitutional and anti-discrimination obligations, publicly report findings, and require time-bound institutional reform plans.
14. The Committee should reaffirm that caste-based occupational segregation, including manual scavenging, bonded labour and hereditary sanitation work, constitutes a form of descent-based discrimination prohibited under Article 1 of ICERD, consistent with CERD General Recommendation No. 29.
15. The Committee should encourage the integration of caste-sensitive indicators into monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 1, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 16, to strengthen assessment of the State Party's compliance with its human rights obligations.