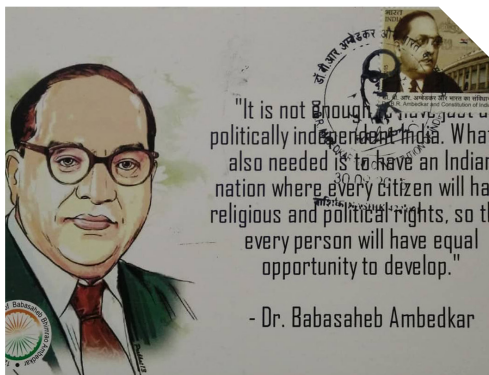


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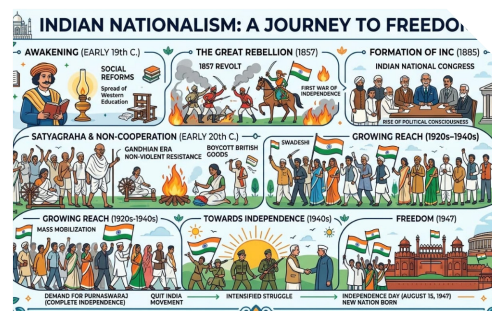
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EDITORIAL

Reservation: Let's Not Make It A Political Weapon

Scattered anti-reservation voices emerging from parts of the country may appear to be a fallout of the recent CJP agitation. Suddenly, words such as meritocracy, equal opportunity, level playing field and capacity have returned to public discourse. At present, they appear more as a counter-reaction than as a mature debate on one of India's most complex social questions.

Reservation has, for decades, been used as a political instrument. Political parties have often discovered electoral possibilities in caste identities, while competing communities have been encouraged to view reservation as a matter of entitlement and competition. The result has been predictable. Instead of weakening caste consciousness, political mobilisation around reservation has sometimes strengthened it. An issue originally intended as an instrument of social correction can therefore become another source of social division. That is precisely why India needs to discuss reservation by leaving political perceptions behind.

The fundamental question should be larger. What kind of society do we want to build? Every patriotic Indian would want India to become a strong, prosperous and socially healthy nation. Equality in all walks of life is indispensable to that objective. A nation cannot achieve its full potential when sections of its population remain burdened by historical deprivation, social exclusion or lack of opportunity. This is not an argument unique to India. Countries that describe themselves as laboratories of equality have also adopted affirmative-action

measures to bring historically disadvantaged communities closer to the mainstream. The United States has experimented with different forms of affirmative action, while several countries in Africa have adopted policies aimed at correcting the consequences of historical discrimination. The methods may differ, but the underlying principle is similar: formal equality alone does not automatically produce substantive equality.

India must therefore understand its own historical circumstances. The roots of caste-based discrimination go back centuries. Social and cultural capital is not distributed equally merely because the constitution guarantees equality before law. A family or community that has been deprived of educational opportunities, economic resources, networks and social confidence for generations cannot always be expected to compete on an identical footing overnight. Special remedies become necessary precisely because the starting points are unequal.

At the same time, this recognition should not prevent us from acknowledging that India is changing rapidly. The economic landscape today is vastly different from the one that existed when reservation policies were introduced. The private sector has become the principal source of employment opportunities for millions. Government employment, once associated with unparalleled security and social prestige, no longer occupies the same position in the aspirations of every young Indian. Private companies increasingly offer attractive salaries, career mobility and opportunities

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that government employment often cannot match. The education sector too presents an interesting picture. In several competitive examinations, the gap between the cut-off marks of reserved and open categories are becoming remarkably narrow. This does not eliminate the continuing need for affirmative action, but it demonstrates that the socio-economic landscape is not static.

Therefore, the reservation debate must evolve with changing India. We often speak of two challenges before the nation - the external enemy and the internal fault lines. The internal challenges need not always be an individual or an organisation. Caste-based division itself can become an internal weakness when it prevents Indians from seeing one another primarily as fellow citizens. The ultimate objective should be to eradicate this division through a deep social commitment to equality—not merely because circumstances compel us to do so. This is where the next phase of the reservation debate becomes important. Reservation may continue for as long as historical and social inequalities require it. But simultaneously, India must ask whether reservation alone is sufficient to empower deprived communities in an economy being transformed by technology, automation and artificial intelligence.

Perhaps the time has come to supplement reservation with stronger educational foundations, scholarships, skill development, entrepreneurship support, access to technology, mentoring, quality schooling and

opportunities for building social and economic capital. The objective should not merely be representation in institutions; it should be the creation of communities capable of competing confidently in a rapidly changing world. Artificial intelligence will transform employment, education and economic opportunity in ways that are difficult to predict fully today. The future belongs increasingly to skills, adaptability and access to technology. Social justice policies must therefore evolve accordingly.

The reservation debate must neither become a political weapon nor an emotional battlefield. It requires sobriety, historical understanding and a national perspective. Supporting reservation does not mean opposing merit. Questioning aspects of reservation does not automatically mean opposing social justice.

India's destination must be equality. Reservation is an instrument — not the destination. As responsible citizens, our task is to ensure that the instrument remains relevant to changing circumstances while never losing sight of the larger national objective: a society in which caste ceases to determine opportunity, dignity or social standing. That transformation must ultimately come not through compulsion, but through conviction and affection. India will become truly strong when equality becomes not merely a constitutional promise, but a deeply rooted social instinct.

Appeal for financial assistance

Social Studies Foundation (SSF) is working with the prime objective of conducting social studies and research of the society in a multi-disciplinary fashion. SSF focus, however, is on those people, who have been facing discrimination and are deprived of benefits of the development and democratic process. SSF logo, thus says, "Knowledge for Empowerment".

"UNHEARD VOICES" is a small step in this direction. It provides a platform to all those

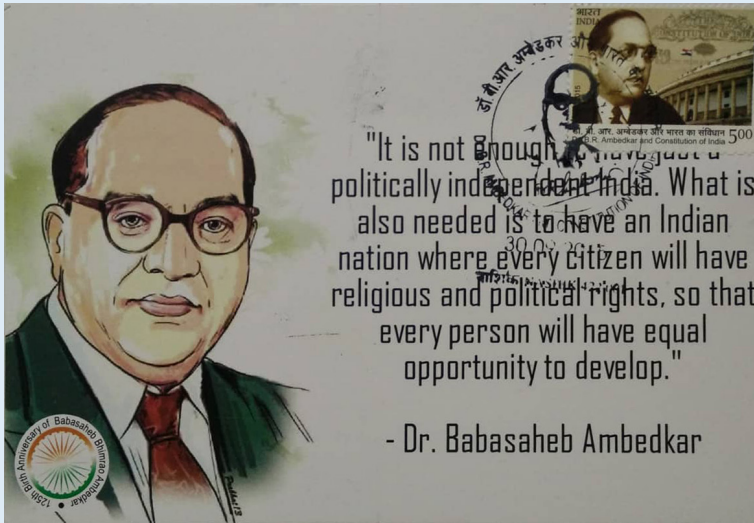
people, who have to be listened to by the Indian citizens to make this country united and integral. We will raise the voice of these people fearlessly. Social Studies Foundation has currently a small set-up to carry out its objectives. We, however, need financial support from our well-wishers, who agree with our objectives. We appeal to the readers and well-wishers to donate generously to the foundation.

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When we speak about nationalism in India, we often reduce it to the freedom struggle, the flag, the nation-state or the political independence of 1947. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's idea of nationalism was much deeper. For him, a nation was not merely a territory liberated from foreign rule. A nation had to liberate its own people from humiliation, ignorance, poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

Dr Ambedkar's Idea of India

Tekchand



Dr Ambedkar made very clearly in 1944: "I am no opponent of a national Government, I am no opponent of Swaraj, I am no opponent of Independence. If I can be assured that I could have independence, education and welfare, which are promised to the nation, I certainly will fight for independence, for nationalism, for freedom..." But he immediately added a warning. If political power merely strengthened one dominant community and "disfranchised, the rights of others", then independence would have little meaning.

This is perhaps the most important key to understanding Dr Ambedkar's nationalism that he demanded a nationalism that included everyone. For Dr Ambedkar, education was one of the first revolutions required to build such a nation. He did not simply tell oppressed people to become educated. He built institutions through which they could actually do so. The People's Education Society, established in 1945, became the vehicle for this effort. Milind College in Aurangabad, established in 1950, opened higher education to young men and women in a region where such opportunities were extremely limited.

This was nationalism in action. Building a

college for people historically excluded from education was, for Dr Ambedkar, as important as making a political speech about the nation. His nationalism was also expressed through economic thinking. Dr Ambedkar understood that political equality could not survive for long without economic opportunity. His writings on public finance, agriculture, labour, industrialisation, banking and monetary policy show a concern with how economic institutions affect ordinary people. In today's language, one can see in his thinking an early concern for financial inclusion: people cannot become genuinely free if they remain dependent on moneylenders, excluded from productive assets, or without access to organised economic institutions.

This is why Dr Ambedkar's nationalism cannot be separated from labour reform. As Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, he worked on issues concerning workers, working hours, maternity benefits, social security and labour welfare. He saw workers not merely as units of production but as citizens whose dignity mattered. His intervention on maternity benefits, for example, recognised that the cost of protecting women



workers could not simply be pushed on to the individual woman. His nationalism therefore travelled from Parliament to the factory floor, from the university classroom to the village, and from constitutional rights to the household.

Perhaps nowhere is this more visible than in his struggle for women's rights. Dr Ambedkar understood that a society could not call itself modern while women remained economically and legally dependent. His Hindu Code Bill sought changes in marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption and property rights. He argued that women's economic independence was essential to their dignity. In his own words: "Unless and until we recognise the rights of women, unless we give them full rights, we shall be losing very much in certain strength of character which arises only if women are economically independent."

The Hindu Code Bill was therefore more than a legal reform. It can be seen as a symbol of Indianness and modern nationalism: the idea that an independent India must also reform its own social institutions. Political freedom without social reform would leave half the population waiting for freedom inside the home.

Dr Ambedkar's advice to women and families was often equally radical. He urged Dalit women to participate in public life and warned against child marriage. Importantly, the historical record does not support the simplistic claim that he told women themselves not to marry or give birth. His message was that girls should not be married before they were economically independent, because early marriage could obstruct their education and development. His thinking on Pakistan also reveals that he approached nationalism through hard political questions rather than slogans. In *Thoughts on Pakistan*, he examined communal conflict, minority rights, political representation, security and the consequences of Partition. One may disagree with some of his conclusions, but his method remains important: he tried to understand what would make the future Indian state stable and capable of protecting its citizens. His nationalism was therefore analytical rather than sentimental.

And then there was the Constitution. Dr Ambedkar did not believe that every social problem should be solved through permanent agitation. He believed that once democratic and constitutional methods were available, citizens should use them seriously. On 25 November 1949, he warned: "We must hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our

social and economic objectives."

He called the abandonment of constitutional methods, when constitutional avenues were open, the "Grammar of Anarchy." This does not mean Dr Ambedkar opposed dissent. His entire life was a history of dissent. He challenged caste, governments, political leaders and social traditions. But he wanted dissent to produce institutions, rights and lasting reform—not merely anger in the streets.

In 1951, addressing students at D.A.V. College in Jalandhar, he warned that the failure of parliamentary democracy could lead to "rebellion, anarchy and communism." He urged young citizens to preserve parliamentary democracy in its true spirit and protect liberty of thought, speech and action.

Dr Ambedkar also reminded Indians that parliamentary traditions were not alien to India. He referred to the Mahaparinibbana Sutta and the functioning of ancient assemblies to show that India had its own traditions of deliberation and collective decision-making. His message was simple but demanding: democracy requires institutions, but institutions require citizens willing to protect them.

That is why Dr Ambedkar's nationalism remains relevant. He wanted an India that was independent from foreign rule, but also independent from caste oppression; democratic in Parliament, but also democratic in society; modern in its laws, but also modern in its treatment of women; economically productive, but also economically inclusive.

For Dr Ambedkar, the nation was not an abstract idea above its people. The nation was its people. And if the weakest citizen could not stand with dignity, Dr Ambedkar's question was whether the nation had truly become free at all. The correct lesson from Dr Ambedkar is therefore not that protest is illegitimate. It is that protest must ultimately strengthen democracy rather than weaken it. The street may express public anger, but Parliament, courts and constitutional debate must remain the primary institutions through which a democratic society converts disagreement into lasting change.

Dr Ambedkar's nationalism was neither blind loyalty nor permanent rebellion. It was constitutional discipline joined with social justice—a nationalism in which education, labour rights, women's equality, economic opportunity and dignity for the marginalised were not side issues, but the very substance of freedom.

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Dalit Conversion: Contesting Boundaries of Social Justice

The caste is the harsh social reality determined by birth into a community, particularly a phenomenon rooted in South Asian Hindu society. Among the reserved categories such as OBC, SC, and ST, only the Scheduled Caste community has religion as the framework for the notification of SC status. Under Article 341 of the Constitution, the President of India has the power to specify the castes, races, or tribes that are officially deemed Scheduled Castes, and only the Parliament of India has the authority to add or remove communities from the SC list through legislation.

Dr Prakash Raj



Recently, the debate has recurred as the Supreme Court of India, in *Chinthada Anand v. State of Andhra Pradesh* (2026), held that a person professing Christianity or Islam cannot be classified as a member of a Scheduled Caste (SC) community. In addition to this, within a couple of weeks, former Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan is expected to submit a report on whether SC status should be extended to Dalit converts. The Commission was constituted by the Union Government in 2022 to examine the social realities of the issue.

Dilemma of Conversion

The pertinent question arising is whether Dalits converted to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or Zoroastrianism should be treated as members of the Scheduled Caste community. The broad argument for rejecting such status is that Christianity and Islam, theologically and scripturally, do not recognise the caste system. However, the issue does not confine itself to SC status alone; rather, it raises substantial questions of equality and social justice through the prism of constitutional objectives, alongside



the need for empirical evidence to facilitate reform. Why do Christian and Muslim Dalits seek SC status? Basically, SC status would enable these marginalised communities to avail reservations in education and employment, along with protection against caste-based atrocities. Dalit Christians allege that they continue to suffer the same social disabilities and stigma irrespective of conversion, as the mindset of upper castes has not changed sufficiently to accept their social mobility.

Nevertheless, various field studies suggest the persistence of casteism among Christians and Muslims, ranging from separate churches to segregated graveyards. It must also be noted that although Dalits enjoy worship rights, they are rarely preferred for priest positions or key administrative posts within religious institutions. In addition, the employment opportunities in minority institutions are, in practice, largely reserved for upper-caste minorities. Thus, second-class treatment and pervasive discrimination remain entrenched within sections of Christian and Muslim communities.

Commission and Burden of Empirical Proof

The Kaka Kalelkar Commission (1955) and the Mandal Commission (1980) recognised that caste-based discrimination and practices are prevalent in religions other than Hinduism. In 2007, the Ranganath Misra Commission recommended extending SC status irrespective of religion, similar to the religion-neutral framework governing Scheduled Tribes, pointing out that caste is a deeply entrenched sociological reality in India that transcends religious boundaries. Historically, the Indian judiciary has placed the burden of proof on the converts.

In *C.M. Arumugam v. S. Rajgopal* (1976), the Supreme Court observed that ‘a caste is more a social combination than a religious group’ while stating that Christianity is theoretically an egalitarian religion. Accordingly, if a convert seeks SC status, they must prove continuing social and economic disabilities.

In *Soosai v. Union of India* (1985), the Supreme Court dismissed the petition as the petitioner failed to provide sufficient empirical evidence demonstrating continuing social disabilities. Moreover, if an individual reconverted to Hinduism, they must demonstrate concrete and unimpeachable evidence of continuing caste practices and acceptance by their caste community. This onus of providing empirical proof delayed justice for converted Dalits.

Pending Constitutional Question

The political mobilisation of Mazhabi

and Ramdasia Sikhs, alleging severe caste discrimination, prompted Parliament in 1956 to include Dalit Sikhs within the Scheduled Caste category, acknowledging the persistence of caste realities beyond Hinduism. In 1990, the V.P. Singh Government recognised the persistence of caste among Dalit Buddhists and extended SC status to them. However, although various commissions have recommended extending SC status to Dalit Christian converts, objections have been raised by the Union Ministry of Social Justice before the Supreme Court, arguing that further studies are required to assess discrimination in other faiths. Meanwhile, a batch of petitions concerning the constitutional question of whether Dalit Christians and Muslims should be granted SC status remains pending before the Supreme Court.

The challenge before the constitutional courts is to interpret Articles 14, 15, 16, and 25 through the prism of historical oppression rather than the prism of Indic religion. The Court must adopt a modern understanding of an inclusive society while taking cognisance of prevailing social realities. The religion-based exclusion from social justice cannot be sustained indefinitely. For affirmative action to achieve its constitutional objectives, religious boundaries should not serve as the determining variable.

Social Justice and Protection

In India, not only Dalits but members of any caste who convert to another religion continue to be socially perceived according to the status of their birth caste. Thus, the adoption of a new religion does not annihilate the caste mentality of dominant castes. This explains why Dalits continue to face physical violence and caste-based abuses even after conversion.

However, the absence of statutory protection for converted Dalits constitutes a legal paradox and violates the principles of international human rights law. Such a disadvantage places vulnerable Dalits in an even more precarious position. Therefore, converted Dalits should be brought within the protective ambit of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, to ensure a life of dignity and substantive equality. The reservation can be provided later with much discussion, but granting protection under the SC/ST Act is necessary.

Even in the United States and South Africa, social justice jurisprudence is primarily grounded in race rather than religion. It is evident that Dalits predominantly experience an intersectionality of double disadvantage; even after conversion for social mobility and dignity, entrenched social hierarchies continue

What does the law say?

Reservations are not based on religion

- Reservation is based on constitutional categories such as SC, ST and OBC.
- No religion has a blanket reservation.



Muslims



- Some Muslim communities are included in OBC lists.
- Eligibility varies by state & community.

Christians



- Some Christian communities are also included in OBC lists.
- There is no religion-wide reservation.

Scheduled Caste reservation

- SC status is currently limited to Hindus, Sikhs & Buddhists under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.
- Dalits who convert to Islam or Christianity generally lose SC status under the present law.

to subjugate their pursuit of equality. The State's refusal to acknowledge this social reality and extend statutory protection and reservation benefits would only aggravate their marginalisation.

Empirical Data to Emancipate

The resolution of this complex issue must be guided by objective, contemporary evidence rather than ideological positions. The findings of the ongoing Justice K.G. Balakrishnan Commission will be crucial in scientifically determining whether the historical disabilities associated with untouchability continue to persist among Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam. Policymakers could explore aligning the criteria for Scheduled Castes with those

applicable to Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), both of which are religion-neutral. If social and educational backwardness constitutes the principal criterion for affirmative action, a transition towards religion-neutral standards may better uphold the spirit of Article 14 (Right to Equality).

The nationwide empirical data collected by Justice K.G. Balakrishnan Commission

would enable a scientific assessment of the contemporary situation and facilitate a better understanding of the persistence of social disabilities among converts. Such a study would provide policymakers with a new empirical framework to determine the extent to which untouchability continues to exist among converted Dalits. It would also equip the judiciary with stronger legal and empirical foundations to implement Article 14 (Right to Equality) in its true spirit. If the empirical findings prove alarming, the State could initially extend statutory protections under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, followed by the extension of reservation benefits after further comprehensive studies. We must note that social exclusion is a profound form of injustice, and the State just adopts serious measures to emancipate the downtrodden in a constitutional welfare democracy.

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जाति जनगणना: Beyond Numbers, In Search of Justice

Ashish

To understand a vast and multilayered society like India, merely counting the population is not enough. It is equally important to know where individuals stand within that population who has access to education, who secures employment, who owns land, and who, for centuries, has been left only with labor. Dr. Laxman Yadav's book seems to be written with this very question at its core, and that is why it is not just a book of our times, but the beginning of an essential debate. This article is based on the same subject, but written from the perspective of a researcher, analysing it critically. It goes beyond the discussion of the book to explore its sociopolitical implications, its relevance in the present context, and some aspects that are usually overlooked in mainstream discourse.

Core Idea of Caste Census

Caste census means that when the country's population is counted, the question asked should not only be "Who are you?" but also "Which caste do you belong to?" In India, data on Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) is recorded in every census, but we do not have reliable, updated figures for Other Backward Classes (OBC) and the remaining general categories.

This creates a peculiar contradiction. Policies are framed, reservations are determined, and schemes are implemented, yet the actual size of the groups for whom these measures are intended is not precisely known. It is like a doctor prescribing medicine without conducting a full examination of the patient. Treatment based on estimates may be possible, but it can never be accurate.

Why did this book feel necessary?

The author argues that while conversations about caste in India, are frequent whether in elections, Parliament, or television debates but they are largely based on assumptions, political gains, and old perceptions rather than facts. Without solid data:



- It will remain unclear which community truly needs how much support.
- The debate on reservations will be more emotional than factual.
- Policies will be framed on guesswork, not on actual needs.
- The real scale of inequality will stay hidden.

This gap likely became the reason for writing the book, along with the attempt to show that without data or facts, democracy continues to make decisions about its own citizens in the dark.

Purpose of the Book: Not Taking any Sides, but Revealing the Truth

One point must be clearly understood here is that the aim of a caste census is not to prove any caste as greater or lesser. Its purpose is:

1. To make the picture of inequality clearer.
2. To highlight the gap between government schemes and actual needs.
3. To bring forth the real condition of backward and marginalized groups.
4. To shift the debate on social justice from emotions to facts.

This distinction is crucial and important. Those who believe that a caste census will “divide” society often forget that divisions already exist in society. The census does not create them; it only attempts to measure them. Just as a medical test does not cause an illness but makes its treatment possible, similarly, a caste census does not generate inequality, it simply reveals it so that remedies can be found.

A Historical Perspective

Caste-based enumeration in India is not a new demand. During British rule, caste data was included in the census up until 1931. After independence, this practice was discontinued, with the reasoning that it might increase divisions within society. Yet, even after nearly nine decades, the question remains unresolved. Can social unity truly be maintained by concealing data, or has this become merely a way to avoid inconvenient truths? History shows that issues suppressed do not disappear; they simply move out of public debate while continuing to exist in ground realities.

Caste and Economic Conditions: A Deep Connection

It would be wrong to assume that caste is merely a matter of social identity. In India, the link between caste and economic status has repeatedly emerged in decades of surveys and studies. Most economically weaker families traditionally belong to backward or marginalized castes. Access to education, ownership of land, and resources passed down through generations are all deeply tied to caste structures. This does not mean that

every person from an upper caste is wealthy or that every individual from a backward caste is poor. However, collective data clearly shows this pattern. For policymaking, collective trends matter far more than individual exceptions and this is precisely where solid data becomes crucial.

OBC: India’s Largest Yet Least Counted Population

The Other Backward Classes (OBC) are often considered the largest demographic category in India. The irony, however, is that no official, updated figure of their exact population exists. As a result:

- Schemes are designed based on outdated estimates.
- Confusion and disputes persist regarding the limits and distribution of reservations.
- Policymakers themselves rely on guesswork to make decisions.

It would not be wrong to call this the problem of the “invisible majority.” A group that may be numerically the largest, yet its presence at the policymaking table remains blurred due to the absence of reliable data.

Politics and the Complicated Relationship with Caste Census

Here a striking paradox emerges. In India, hardly any political party refrains from using caste equations during elections. From ticket distribution to alliance formation, caste is present everywhere. Yet, when it comes to collecting solid, transparent caste data, the very political will often weakens.

One explanation could be that accurate figures might alter existing power equations. Groups that have long been underestimated may, once their real numbers are revealed, raise new demands for political representation and resource allocation. This uncertainty often becomes the biggest obstacle in the path of gathering such data.

Potential Benefits of Caste Census

If conducted properly and with transparency, a caste census can yield several concrete benefits:

- Accuracy in policy making - Schemes would be based on actual needs rather than estimates.
- Fair distribution of resources - Programs in education, healthcare, and employment would reach the right groups.
- Fact-based debate - Sensitive issues like reservations would be discussed on the basis of data rather than emotions.
- Precise identification of inequality - It would become clear who truly requires assistance.

Fear and Confusion: Understanding the

Other Side

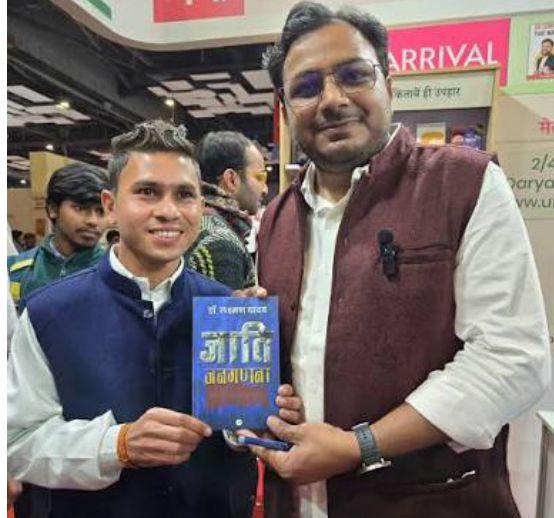
It is also true that within society, there are fears and apprehensions that a caste census might deepen divisions or give new momentum to casteism. These concerns are not entirely unfounded. If data is misused or distorted for political gain, it could indeed cause harm.

This is where the author's argument becomes crucial: hiding a problem does not solve it. Only by recognizing and understanding it can solutions be found. The real question should not be "Should we collect data or not?" but rather "How can the data be used responsibly?"

From a Researcher's Perspective: Some Additional Dimensions

Beyond the issues raised in the book, there are several other points that deserve serious consideration in the present context:

- **Data Security and Privacy** - In any large scale survey, it is essential to ensure that personal information is not misused. If sensitive details like caste data are leaked or fall into the wrong hands, the social impact could be severe. Without a strong legal framework for data protection, a caste census would remain incomplete and risky.
- **Experiences of Different States** - States like Bihar have conducted caste based surveys at their own level. The lessons from these experiments whether administrative challenges or complexities in data collection or can be valuable when planning a caste census at the national level. Learning from local experiences is a practical way to improve any major policy.
- **Role of Digital Technology** - In today's digital environment, linking information from Aadhaar, ration cards, and other government databases can make the process of collecting caste data faster and more accurate. However, this also raises serious concerns about data misuse, which must be addressed carefully.
- **International Comparisons** - In many countries, ethnic, racial, or community data is included in the census and used for fair distribution of resources. For India, it would be useful to understand how other nations have maintained transparency and trust while collecting sensitive social data.
- **Changing Dynamics of Caste** - It is important to recognize that caste is not static. With urbanization, education, and economic changes, the socioeconomic status of many communities has shifted. Therefore, caste census should not be seen as a one-time exercise, but as a process to be repeated periodically so that the data always reflects



current realities.

Why is this issue so crucial in the present context?

Today, when debates around education, employment, and reservations are ongoing in the country, any policy without solid data remains incomplete and unclear. The caste census is not merely an administrative exercise but a fundamental step toward social justice. This book appears to be an honest attempt to bring such an important and sensitive subject to the common reader in simple language, without prejudice.

In line with the spirit of the Constitution, it is essential to understand clearly that the purpose of the caste census is not to stand against or in favour of any caste, nor is it an attempt to spread hatred or division. Rather, it is an effort to put into practice the principles of social justice and equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution. It seeks to ensure that policies are based not on assumptions, but on reality.

Dr. Laxman Yadav's book raises an essential question: do we truly understand our society, or are we merely guided by assumptions and perceptions? The caste census is not a magical solution that will eliminate inequality overnight, but it is certainly the first and most necessary step toward bringing the truth to light through data.

The author argues that "a disease does not get cured by hiding it, but by identifying it." In the same way, policies of social justice can only be framed correctly when we have the real picture of society before us. This is the book's greatest message and the reason why it stands as a vital and timely text for today's India.

This article is an independent analysis, which, along with the core themes of the book, also incorporates some additional aspects from the researcher's own perspective.

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India's Freedom Struggle: A Collective Journey of Resistance

India's freedom struggle was a remarkable journey shaped by diverse ideologies, communities, and countless acts of courage. From constitutional reformers and revolutionaries to Gandhian movements and marginalized voices, each contributed to the nation's quest for freedom. Together, these struggles transformed independence from an aspiration into a collective movement for justice, dignity, and democracy.

Divya

India's independence was not the outcome of a single ideology or leader, but the culmination of countless struggles, sacrifices, and visions. From moderates, who believed in petitions to revolutionaries who wielded arms, from Gandhian nonviolence to tribal uprisings, the freedom movement was a mosaic of diverse voices. It was this plurality that gave the struggle its strength and ensured that the dream of liberty was not confined to elites but embraced by the masses.

Early Phases: Moderates and Reformers

When the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, its leaders — Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha

— believed in constitutional methods. They trusted the British sense of justice and sought reforms within the empire. Their petitions, speeches, and annual Congress sessions created a political awakening, but their vision was limited to self-government under British rule rather than complete independence. But these moderates laid the foundation of organized politics and civil liberties, ensuring

Rise of Revolutionaries

The repression following the Partition of Bengal in 1905 ignited a new spirit. Secret societies like Anusilan Samiti in Bengal and Abhinava Bharat in Maharashtra emerged, led by figures such as V.D. Savarkar. Young



revolutionaries like Khudiram Bose, Chandra Shekhar Azad, and Bhagat Singh became household names, their martyrdom inspiring generations. Abroad, leaders like Shyamji Krishna Varma and Madam Cama kept the flame alive, while the Ghadar Movement in North America mobilized expatriates against colonial rule. These revolutionaries demonstrated that freedom was worth any sacrifice, even life itself.

Gandhian Transformation

Into this turbulent landscape entered Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who transformed the struggle with his philosophy of nonviolence and mass mobilization. From Champaran to Dandi, Gandhi's campaigns brought peasants, workers, and women into the movement. His ability to unite diverse communities under the banner of satyagraha made the freedom struggle a truly national movement. The Quit India Movement of 1942, though brutally suppressed, showed the British that India's demand for freedom could no longer be ignored.

Marginalized Voices in Struggle

While mainstream narratives highlight Congress leaders and revolutionaries, the contributions of marginalized communities were equally vital. Jhalkari Bai, a Dalit woman warrior, fought alongside Rani Lakshmibai in 1857, even disguising herself as the queen to mislead British forces. Gangu Pehalwan, a working-class wrestler, mobilized local resistance against colonial exploitation. Udham Singh carried the pain of Jallianwala Bagh to London, assassinating Michael O'Dwyer in 1940 as an act of justice for Punjab's peasants.

Birsa Munda, the tribal leader from Jharkhand, led the Ulgulan (Great Tumult) against exploitative landlords and British officials, asserting indigenous rights and dignity. Nandkumar Kangda, though less known, worked tirelessly to mobilize marginalized groups, ensuring that independence was not seen as an elite project but a collective aspiration.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, architect of the Constitution, transformed the freedom struggle into a larger vision of social justice, ensuring liberty was grounded in equality. Babu Jagjivan Ram, another Dalit leader, rose to prominence as a voice for workers and inclusive governance. Their presence reminds us that independence was not only political but also social — a fight against caste, class, and cultural oppression.

Civil Liberties and Democratic Traditions

One of the most remarkable features of the national movement was its commitment to democracy and civil liberties. The Congress functioned like a parliament, encouraging

debate and dissent. Leaders across ideological spectrums — from Motilal Nehru to Madan Mohan Malaviya — opposed repressive bills like the Public Safety Bill of 1928. This tradition of defending liberties was enshrined in the Constitution of independent India, ensuring that freedom was not merely the absence of colonial rule but the presence of rights.

Economic Vision and Social Orientation

The freedom struggle was also a battle for economic justice. Leaders recognized that independence would be hollow without industrialization and self-reliance. By the 1930s, there was a commitment to economic planning and a pro-poor orientation, strengthened by Gandhi's emphasis on village industries and the rise of socialist voices. Though socialism never became the Congress's official goal, debates around it shaped India's postindependence economic policies, balancing public sector growth with democratic ideals.

Legacy of Unity

Despite ideological differences, the freedom movement fostered unity. Leaders from Naoroji to Nehru acknowledged that India was a "nation-in-the-making," and the struggle itself was the crucible in which national identity was forged. The sacrifices of revolutionaries, the patience of moderates, the vision of Gandhi, and the voices of marginalized communities together created a collective legacy. This unity, though tested by partition and communal violence, ensured that secularism and democracy became the pillars of independent India.

Freedom as a Living Struggle

India's independence was not a sudden gift in 1947 but the result of decades of struggle, sacrifice, and vision. It was shaped by moderates who believed in petitions,

revolutionaries who embraced martyrdom, Gandhi who mobilized masses, and marginalized leaders who fought for dignity and equality. Remembering Jhalkari Bai, Gangu Pehalwan, Udham Singh, Birsa Munda, Nandkumar Kangda, Ambedkar, and Jagjivan Ram is not just historical justice — it is a reminder that freedom must always be inclusive.

The struggle against colonialism created a nation, but the struggle against inequality continues. True independence lies not only in political sovereignty but in building a society rooted in justice, dignity, and inclusivity. The voices from the margins, once silenced, now call us to expand the meaning of freedom for generations to come.

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Atrocities Act Investigation, Special Units Needed

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, remains India's most comprehensive safeguard against caste based crimes. Yet, gaps in policing, prosecution, and victim and witness protection persist. Strengthening 'multi skilled specialized units', 'inclusive mechanisms' and 'socially-empowered approaches' are vital to ensure justice, trust and meaningful social transformation.



Upendra Baghel



Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989

On 11 September 1989, a new law, The Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, (PoA Act), was enacted with an intention of eliminating caste-based crimes, inhuman treatment, discrimination and social humiliation against the SC and ST communities. This law was amended in 2016 and 2018 with additions of more provisions. As of today, this law is the most comprehensive: preventive, enforcement, investigative, prosecution, compensation, victim assistance and support, witness protection, socio economic rehabilitation, criminalizing the neglect of duties and even duty to ensure effective implementation.

Implementation of PoA Act:

Its effective implementation should have transformed our communities, which has not taken place. At the community levels, three departments of the government are entrusted to enforce this law: Police departments, Prosecution department and Social Welfare department or Social Justice and Empowerment department. In addition to these, the courts and magistrate

are entrusted with judicial and quasi-judicial functions. Most of the responsibilities are entrusted to the police. It is the police which triggers the causative actions.

There are special courts and exclusive special courts and special prosecutors and exclusive prosecutors for speedy trial of the cases. The SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995 provides mechanism to review implementation of the legislation through State Level Vigilance & Monitoring Committee (SLVMC) under the chairmanship of Chief Minister and District Level Vigilance & Monitoring Committee (DLVMC) under the District Magistrate. These committees hold review meetings, SLVMC at every six months and DLVMC at every quarter.

National Commission for Schedule Castes (NCSC) and National Commission for Schedule Tribes (NCST) are the constitutional bodies established under Article 338 of the Constitution of India with the objective of safeguarding the rights and interest of the respective groups. The Constitution recognises the vulnerability of these groups including their exploitation, discrimination and marginalization. There are also similar commissions for SCs and STs at the



state levels.

Cases of crimes against Schedule Castes:

Two thirds of all registered crimes against Schedule Castes originate from four states, all in north Bharat. In 2024, a total of 55698 cases were registered across country for committing crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs). Most of these: 66% of the cases, originated from four states of north India: Uttar Pradesh contributed to 14642 cases – 26%, followed by Madhya Pradesh (7767), Bihar (7549) and Rajasthan (7,008). Among these, 6963 cases were registered under PoA Act only. After investigation of reported cases, on average 82% cases are charge sheeted. In the above four states, charge sheet rates are as: 99.7% in Madhya Pradesh, 85.8% in Uttar Pradesh, 87.9% in Bihar and 43.9% in Rajasthan. (Source: NCRB data).

Conviction is also recorded high in Uttar Pradesh, 73% of the cases adjudicated by the courts, 3150 cases got convicted against 1108 cases acquitted, while in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan convictions are less, 36-37% in these states. (Source: NCRB data)

Social theories for the caste-based strains and possibly discrimination

Registered cases cannot be the only parameters for overall ground situation of the extent of problem of caste-based discrimination, exploitation and social behaviour and practices which exist in Bhartiya society. Many incidents are never reported as they are part of societal norms and stereotypes.

Caste discrimination is deeply rooted in social hierarchy, and it marginalizes lower-caste groups—particularly SCs and STs—restricting their access to social status, financial inclusion, employment and basic dignity, despite strict constitutional safeguards and affirmative policies through reservations. With spread of education and penetration of democracy, members of these underprivileged communities strive for their adequate share in economic and social spectrum and oppose discriminations and social practices. The social dominance theory and intergroup threat theory surmise, dominant groups strive to maintain their social hierarchies that protect their status and when a group perceives its status to be under threat, it may respond with negative reactions attempting to reassert its dominance. These may manifest in stereotypes undermining marginalized caste's merit and ability, escalating social tensions and discriminatory practices like untouchability, access restrictions and related exhibitions to rationalize and preserve higher-caste superiority. When socioeconomic gaps narrow or caste reservations are introduced, higher castes have sometimes responded with opposition and even violence against lower

castes.

Intergroup trust deficit in administration of justice: more in policing

Marginalized groups tend to exhibit lower trust than dominant groups in justice delivery institutions like the police and courts. This phenomenon is observed worldwide. Factors such as perceptions of discrimination from law enforcement, procedural unfairness against marginalized groups or non-observance of procedures to support dominant groups, and power imbalances contribute to this trust gap. Moreover, the legacy of past discrimination can foster social conditioning and hesitations among marginalized groups, worsening the intergroup trust gap in police through intergenerational transmission via community narratives, vicarious experiences, and parental socialization.

Police has been using coercion and physical force to regulate and control behaviour of others and further the coercive interactions typically result in additional counter-control from other sides. The confidence gap regarding the police has broader implications for how communities interpret and experience discriminatory social interactions. A larger trust gap translates into expectations of greater unfairness from law enforcement, making deprived classes and lower castes more sceptical of police. Reducing trust gap can help them become more resilient against discrimination, potentially lowering experienced untouchability. By bridging the inter-caste trust gap in police, policymakers can mitigate intensified untouchability and its manifestations and discrimination, fostering a more equitable society in which empowerment benefits its intended recipients.

Issues which the PoA Act intends to address are deep rooted in Bhartiya society and its people. There are even instances of institutional bias. In Uttar Pradesh where the largest number of atrocities cases are registered, there are issues of minimizing the offences, cases and cross-cases with intentions of pressurizing the other side of disputes to find amicable settlements and accusing more people. Even complaints are not registered promptly after incidents, they are filed after delays or consulting others including activists and lawyers. Victim and witness protections lack. When a serious violation of PoA Act and grave crime against the SC group member is not addressed promptly, it becomes a public concern disturbing public order giving rise of political and collective overtones.

Inadequate preventive, comprehensive investigation and protection mechanisms:

The Prevention of Atrocities Act is cognizant of holistic approach to get rid of acts of atrocities

which are ingrained in social behaviour. Each reported incident should not be considered in isolation but should be investigated in-depth to analyse social, religious, cultural, economic, political and historical dimensions affixing criminal responsibilities and devising preventive, protective and rehabilitative interventions. Victims and witnesses have their rights, including protection from all types of threats, treatment with fairness, respect and dignity and due regard to their special needs.

The fact that investigation of cases of untouchability, harassments and atrocity against dalits needs a focused approach was recognized in 1972 in National Conference of all the Ministers of Backward Class Welfare from all over the country. It led to the creations of special cells in every state. Recognizing similar echoes from the POA Act, many states created Special Police Stations, Special Public Prosecutors and Special Courts.

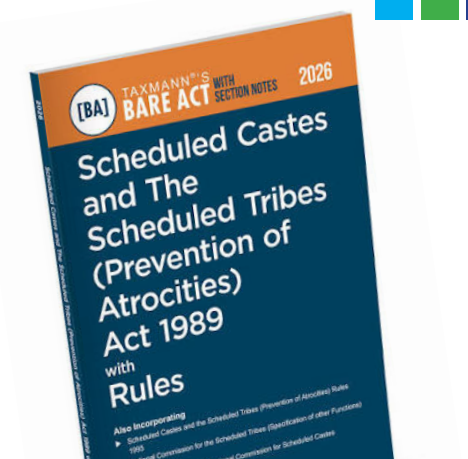
On issue of special police stations, the Parliament's Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment's recent report (March 2026) noted that only seven states have dedicated police stations for SC/ST cases. These 181 special police stations are in Madhya Pradesh (51), Bihar (40), Karnataka (33), Chhattisgarh (27), Jharkhand (24), Kerala (3) and Puducherry (3). None in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

In Madhya Pradesh, the police created Anusuchit Jati Janjati Kalyan (AJK) branch at the police headquarters headed by a senior police officer. One specialized police station, AJK Police Station, has been established at every district level. These police stations report directly to the District Police Headquarters. Similarly, Bihar has created one SC/ST Police Thana at the district level.

Karnataka's innovative approach:

Karnataka state adopted a different approach. The state created Directorate of Civil Rights Enforcement through the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW), budgeted within the MSW but staffed by police officers on deputation from Police department. It is headed by a DG/ADG level officer on deputation, who reports to MSW. All cases registered under PoA Act in police stations are informed to this Directorate.

Earlier, this Directorate had limited investigative capacity with their presence at the range/ zone headquarters levels. Now, in pursuant to the Government Order, 11 April 2025, the Directorate has been declared as police station at the Headquarters level with its District Headquarter Units also police stations as well for the purpose of PoA Act and other sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) with



it. With this mechanism, any victim of atrocity can approach the nearest Police Station which initiates investigation as per law and immediately inform the Directorate about the case. Police Station continues with investigation till it's takeover by the Directorate's police station. The victim/complainant can also approach the Directorate's police station directly and report the case of atrocity.

The mechanism empowers the victim/complainant to report to the Directorate's police station if Police Station does not address his/her complaint. The Directorate is a part of the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) and hence it is distanced from normative coercive power structure of police. The victims' concerns regarding rehabilitation and compensation assistance are addressed quickly and moreover the Directorate can develop specialized skills and expertise to investigate these crimes.

Inclusive approach led by Ministry of Social Welfare supported by Police and Local Bodies:

States in north Bharat should review their existing mechanisms in totality. Considering the nature of local communities, castes consolidations and competitiveness, political realities and existing intergroup trust deficit in law enforcement, approach may be deliberated which is inclusive of local communities and government institutions especially Ministry of Social Welfare/ Social Justice & Empowerment supported by police. This model may work better infusing trust, fairness, institutional safeguards as well as reducing the adverse impact of local dynamics. It will bring specialized skills in investigations of atrocity cases, protection needs of victims and witnesses and prevention and rehabilitative efforts.

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Dharmanand Kosambi: A Life in Search of Knowledge

As India marks the 150th birth anniversary of Acharya Dharmanand Damodar Kosambi, it is worth revisiting the remarkable life of a man who spent much of his life searching—not for power, wealth or status, but for knowledge and truth. Born in Goa in 1876, Dharmanand Kosambi went on to become one of India's most respected Buddhist scholars, writers and Pali experts. He was also the father of the celebrated mathematician and Marxist historian D. D. Kosambi. But long before he became a renowned scholar, he was a young man driven by a deep intellectual restlessness.

At around the age of twenty-five, Kosambi left home in search of knowledge. His journey was not an ordinary journey of travel. It was a search for answers to some of the most fundamental questions of life. He travelled

being struggling with questions and gradually transforming himself through learning. His intellectual journey eventually made him an authority on Pali and Buddhist literature. His scholarship took him to institutions such as the University of Calcutta, Fergusson College in Pune and Baroda. He also worked at Harvard University in the United States and was associated with research and teaching in Russia. His contribution was not confined to academic circles. He made a conscious effort to bring Buddhist thought to ordinary Marathi readers through simple and accessible writing.

Among his important works are Bhagwan Buddha, Buddhaila Sarasangraha, Nivedan, Samadhi Marg and writings on the functioning of the Buddhist Sangha. But Kosambi's relevance goes beyond Buddhism and scholarship. His writings reveal a person deeply concerned about social reform, particularly the position of women.

He advocated women's education even after marriage. He appealed to husbands to continue educating their wives instead of treating marriage as the end of a woman's education. This was a remarkably progressive position in a society where women's education was still heavily restricted.

His position on child marriage was even more direct. He questioned the morality of a 25-year-old man marrying an eight-year-old girl. His appeal was simple but radical: if a grown man could not find an adult woman as his partner, he should remain unmarried rather than marry a child.

This was not merely a question of marriage. It reflected his understanding that education, maturity and dignity were essential to a woman's life. A society that denied girls education and forced them into marriage could not claim to be truly progressive.

Kosambi's social thinking therefore had a practical dimension. He did not merely discuss religion as a matter of spiritual belief. He was interested in how ideas could change human behaviour and improve society.

His association with Mahatma Gandhi further expanded his social engagement. He spent time at Gujarat Vidyapith and later established Bahujaan Vihar in Mumbai as a place connected with poor workers and Buddhist monks. His life increasingly combined scholarship, social engagement and public education.



through Pune, Gwalior, Kashi, Nepal, Gaya, Madras, Sri Lanka, Burma, Calcutta, Indore, Sikkim and Baroda, and eventually went to the United States.

What makes his journey particularly remarkable is that he did not approach religion with a closed mind. He studied Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam, trying to understand their teachings and traditions. His search ultimately led him to Buddhism. But even after becoming a Buddhist, he remained a scholar and seeker rather than a blind follower. His life suggests that conviction can emerge from inquiry, comparison and experience.

His travels and the experiences of his early life were recorded in his autobiographical travel narrative Nivedan. First published in 1924, the book is now more than a century old. It is far more than a conventional autobiography. It is the story of a young Indian who walked, travelled, struggled and studied because he wanted to understand the truth for himself.

That is what makes Nivedan so compelling. Kosambi does not present himself as a flawless hero. His account is remarkably candid. There is hardship, uncertainty, poverty, disappointment and perseverance. The reader sees a human



His intellectual legacy also intersects with the history of modern India's Buddhist revival. His writings and interpretation of Buddhism helped create an intellectual environment in which Buddhism could be reconsidered as a rational, ethical and socially meaningful tradition. His work was among the influences that contributed to the wider circulation of Buddhist ideas in modern India, including the intellectual journey of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

The final phase of Kosambi's life was as extraordinary as the beginning. He spent his last days at Sevagram Ashram and gradually gave up food and water, following the idea of *sallekhana*, which he had encountered in Jain and Buddhist philosophical traditions. He died in 1947; the year India became independent.

There is a striking symbolism in his life. He was born in colonial India and died at the threshold of independent India. In between, he travelled across India and the world, studied different religions, mastered ancient languages and tried to make knowledge accessible to ordinary people.

The 150th birth anniversary year of

Dharmanand Kosambi, began on October 9, 2025, provides an opportunity to rediscover this extraordinary life. His story reminds us that education is not merely the accumulation of degrees, religion is not merely inherited identity, and travel is not merely movement from one place to another.

For Kosambi, education was a lifelong journey, religion was a subject for inquiry, and travel was a means of discovering the world and oneself. Perhaps that is the most enduring lesson of Nivedan. More than a hundred years after its first publication, it still asks us a simple question: Are we willing to leave the comfort of inherited beliefs and familiar boundaries in search of knowledge? Dharmanand Kosambi did.

And that is why his life deserves to be remembered—not merely as the life of a Buddhist scholar, but as the life of a fearless Indian seeker who spent his years asking questions, learning from different traditions and ultimately choosing Buddhism after a long journey of intellectual exploration.

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Centre disburses ₹7,981 crore for Scheduled Caste students' education support

The government has disbursed over ₹7,981 crore to more than 75 lakh Scheduled Caste students in 2025–26 to support their education and empowerment. Social Justice and Empowerment Minister said that the government is committed to ensuring inclusive development and social justice for all sections of society through targeted interventions and welfare initiatives. He said the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment is implementing a range of schemes focused on the educational empowerment of marginalised students belonging to the Scheduled Castes. Expenditure under SC welfare schemes has shown consistent positive growth, with an upward trend, including a 21 per cent increase under the Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme for SCs and others.

Government Proposes 40% Hike in SC/ST Atrocity Compensation, up to ₹12 Lakh

The government has proposed a more than 40% increase in compensation for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe victims of atrocities, with the maximum assistance likely to rise from ₹8.25 lakh to around ₹12 lakh and the minimum

from ₹85,000 to ₹1 lakh. The Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry has linked the proposed revision to the rise in the Consumer Price Index. The proposal, sent to the Expenditure Finance Committee for approval, would mark the first revision in compensation in a decade, after the last increase in 2016.



The government has also proposed one-time assistance of ₹5 lakh to states for setting up special police stations to deal with offences under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Only seven states and Union Territories currently have such stations, with 181 functioning across Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala and Puducherry. The parliamentary standing committee has flagged the lack of institutional mechanisms, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, which report high numbers of atrocities but have no dedicated special police stations.

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DIN VISHESH



15h August Independence Day

India's independence, achieved on 15 August 1947, was the culmination of centuries of resistance against colonial rule. While leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel are often remembered, the struggle was equally shaped by countless voices from marginalized communities whose sacrifices rarely find space in mainstream narratives.

Jhalkari Bai, a Dalit woman warrior in Rani Lakshmi Bai's army, played a decisive role in the 1857 revolt by disguising herself as the queen to mislead British forces. Tribal leader Birsa Munda mobilized indigenous communities in Jharkhand through the Ulgulan movement, asserting their rights against exploitative landlords and colonial policies. Udham Singh, born into poverty, carried the anguish of Punjab's peasants to the global stage when he avenged the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

The freedom struggle was also intertwined with social reform. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, himself from a marginalized background, ensured that independence was not just political but also a foundation for social justice through the Constitution. Leaders like Babu Jagjivan Ram championed workers' rights and inclusive governance, while lesser-known figures such as Nandkumar Kangda mobilized oppressed communities at the grassroots level.

India's independence was thus not the achievement of a few elites, but a collective cry for dignity and equality. Remembering these marginalized voices reminds us that freedom was—and remains—a struggle for justice, inclusivity, and the empowerment of all citizens.



20th August
Sree Narayan Guru
Birth Anniversary



7th September
Raje Umaji Naik
Birth Anniversary

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