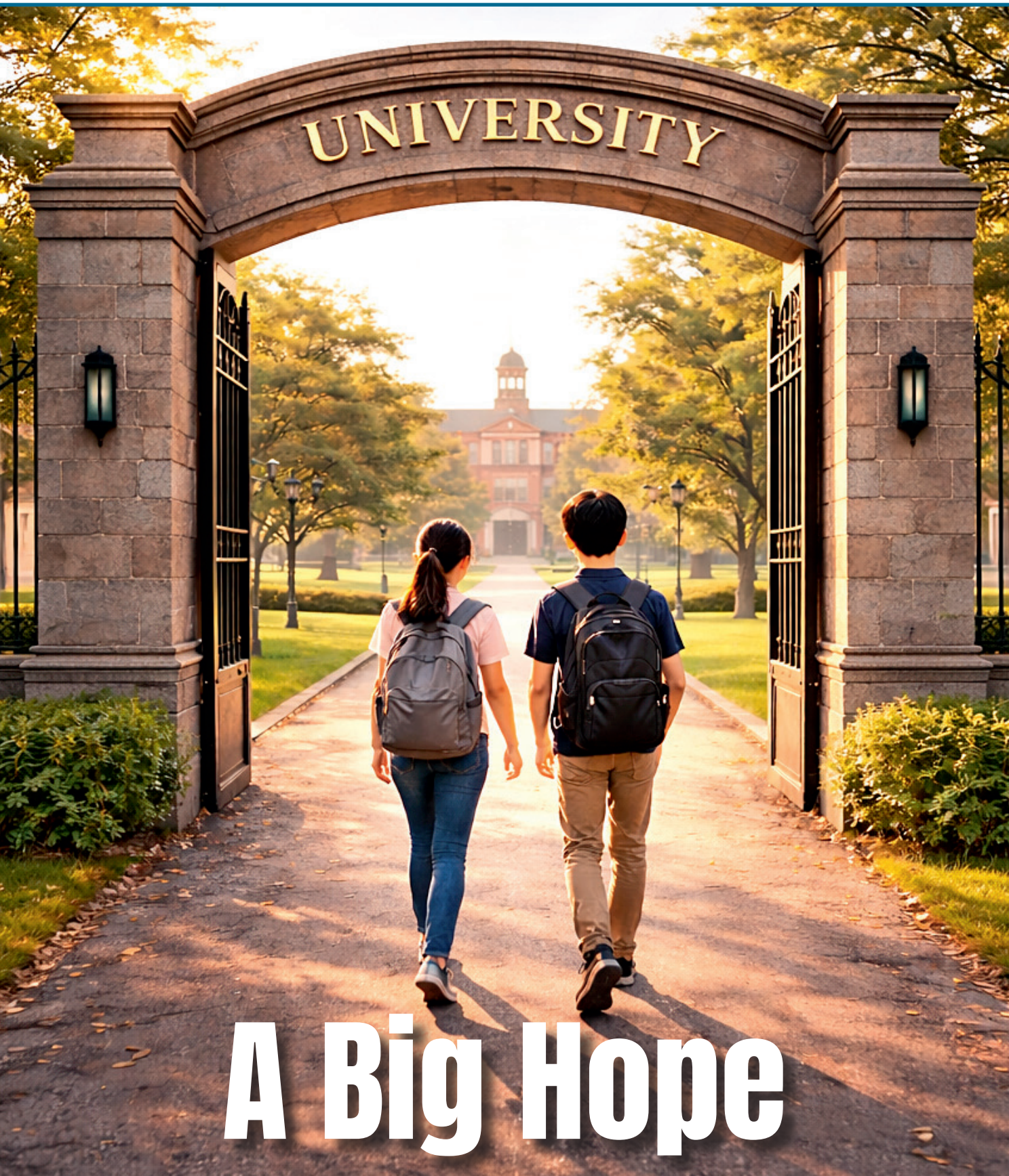


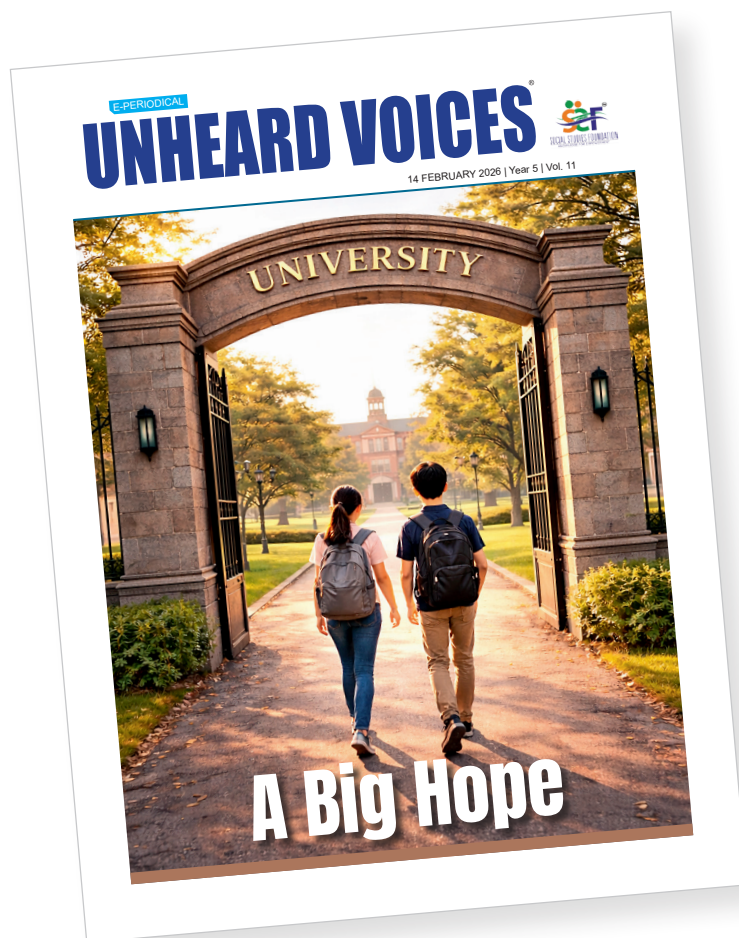
# UNHEARD VOICES<sup>®</sup>



14 FEBRUARY 2026 | Year 5 | Vol. 11



# A Big Hope



## CONTENTS

**06** A big hope : Increasing Participation of Marginalised students

---

**11** Sant Ravidas's Begumpura : An Manifestation of authentic Indian thoughts

---

**13** NCRB Report on Atrocities Cases

---

**15** Contribution of Matua Community to Freedom Movement

---

**18** Honouring Neglected with Padma Awards

---

**23** Deprived Communities in Kerala and the Road Ahead

---



## 'Bodh' From Bodh Gaya

The agitation at Bodh Gaya, which began quietly around Buddha Jayanti in May 2025, raises questions far larger than the immediate events that culminated in the arrest of Bhante Vinayacharya and subsequent violence. The movement failed to gain wider national attention initially, partly because public focus was diverted by Operation Sindoor. However, the issue has once again re-surfaced with a rally in Delhi on 12th February, 2026, indicating that topic continues to be alive. During the agitation the presence of ultra-right sloganeering was seen, —signaling a crucial test as to how India today engages with its own civilisational plurality.

Bodh Gaya is not an isolated case. Across India, there exists several sacred geographies where multiple spiritual traditions—Vedic, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh—have historically coexisted within the same physical and cultural space. These sites were once symbols of harmony, dialogue, and mutual reverence. Pilgrims of different traditions arrived with `shraddha`, offering respect without contestation, while scholars and seekers engaged in intellectual deliberation without questioning one another's legitimacy. The underlying sentiment was one of oneness.

Over time, however, many of these spaces have transformed from shared spiritual centres into arenas of dispute. What were once places of rich plural traditions are now increasingly interpreted through the narrow lens of ownership, symbols, and historical claims. The shift is telling: instead of discussing philosophical convergence, debates now revolve around idols, inscriptions, architectural remnants, and assertions such as "our signs are visible here."

It is tempting to place the blame entirely

on colonial rule. Undeniably, British policies institutionalised divisions and exploited existing differences. Yet it would be intellectually dishonest to ignore the uncomfortable truth that these fault lines already existed. Colonial rule did not invent them; it merely used them strategically for their purposes. The responsibility for today's conflicts cannot be outsourced indefinitely to history. Somewhere along the way, we forgot the principle of oneness that once held these traditions together.

Spirituality, by its very nature, has multiple dimensions. Diversity of paths does not necessarily imply conflict of purpose. When the sense of unity prevailed, such sacred spaces became India's vaibhav—sources of civilisational pride and moral authority. Their decline into sites of confrontation reflects not a theological failure, but a social and intellectual one.

What makes the current moment particularly fragile is the ecosystem in which these disputes now unfold. In the age of social media and artificial intelligence, narratives can be sharpened, distorted, and amplified at unprecedented speed. Emotion often overtakes reflection, and moderation is mistaken for weakness. The risk is not merely local unrest but the normalization of extremism as a mode of engagement.

This is why dialogue—genuine, sustained, and social—is indispensable. India often witnesses a paradox: personal relationships across communities remain warm, yet positions harden dramatically when collective issues arise. Dialogue cannot be episodic or symbolic; it must exist at the social level, beyond formal statements and courtroom proceedings. Without this, misunderstandings calcify into permanent fault lines.

The role of the government is equally critical.

For feedback please click the below link : <https://forms.gle/XWQ19k9xC1CyNr6e7>

'Unheard Voices' monthly publication is owned by Social Studies Foundation, Printed and Published by Hari Sowani, Printed at Sanwad Trade Prints, Gowaikar Bldg, 595, Shaniwar Peth, Pune- 411030 and Published at 1196, Sadashiv Peth, Pune- 411030.

**Editor** : Vijendra Sonawane

**Advisory Editorial Board** : Dr Aditi Narayani Paswan, Edward Mendhe, Prakash Raj

**Disclaimer** : The views expressed in the periodical are personal views of the author.

The editor & publisher may not agree to it.

Wherever disputes arise—Bodh Gaya included—administrative silence or delay only allows mistrust to deepen. Immediate engagement with protesters, religious representatives, and civil society is not appeasement; it is responsible governance. Such issues cannot be resolved through force or legal technicalities alone. Conversation is not a concession—it is a necessity.

Religious leadership across traditions also bears responsibility. Consensus-building cannot be left to the state alone. Spiritual heads must step forward, not just to defend institutional interests, but to reaffirm shared civilisational values. Alarmingly, some recent statements by spiritual figures have created confusion and doubt in the minds of ordinary people. When religious scholarship turns into a forceful voice of agitation, it risks losing its moral authority.

Vedic scholars, in particular, may need to reflect calmly on the place of Buddhist philosophy within the larger Indian philosophical tradition. A serious study of Indian spiritual literature—across schools—inevitably leads toward unity, not exclusion. At the very least,

the contribution of Buddha to India’s spiritual heritage must be acknowledged clearly and communicated honestly to the common citizen.

This acknowledgement is not merely an internal matter. At political and cultural levels, it is Rama and Buddha together who have historically bound South and Southeast Asia into a shared civilisational space. India’s soft power in the region rests significantly on the legacy of Buddha. Recent internal discord threatens to erode this moral capital. If India wishes to retain its influence and relevance among neighbouring nations, it must resolve its internal spiritual disputes swiftly and inclusively. Every conflict carries within it the possibility of a win-win solution. That possibility emerges only when extremism—of any kind—is consciously abandoned.

The Bodh Gaya episode should, therefore, be seen not merely as an agitation, but as a mirror. It asks whether India is willing to rediscover the middle path—of dialogue, restraint, and shared ownership of its sacred inheritance. The answer to that question will shape not only its internal harmony, but its civilisational standing in the world.



## Appeal for financial assistance

**S**ocial 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.

CIT EXEMPTION, PUNE/80G/2020-21/A/10158



.....  
Please contact : 9699644930, (020)29526979  
or mail us to : [uv@unheardvoices.co.in](mailto:uv@unheardvoices.co.in)  
.....

For feedback please click the below link :  
<https://forms.gle/XWQ19k9xCiCyNr6e7>

Entering **6th** year

**UNHEARD VOICES**  
SOCIAL STUDIES FOUNDATION  
FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

## Appeal to Readers and well-wishers

**S**ocial Studies Foundation (SSF), as you all know, works with the core objective of developing a deeper and more authentic understanding of society through rigorous, multidisciplinary research. Its approach integrates perspectives from sociology, economics, political science, history, and public policy to study social realities in a comprehensive manner.

We are happy to inform you that UNHEARD VOICES will complete five years of continuous publication in April this year, 2026. The inaugural issue, released on April 14, 2021, was dedicated to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on his Jayanti, symbolizing the magazine's commitment to social justice, equality, and constitutional values. It has been a significant initiative in furthering the vision of SSF.

SSF takes pride in the fact that UNHEARD VOICES (Monthly E-magazine) has been published consistently for 60 uninterrupted issues since April 2021. The magazine's journey itself stands as a testimony to commitment and perseverance of SSF.

Conceived as a platform for communities whose concerns have historically been ignored or underrepresented, the magazine seeks to amplify perspectives that rarely find space in mainstream discourse. Its objective is not only to document social realities but also to encourage empathy, informed dialogue, and constructive engagement. Over the years, the publication has addressed a wide range of issues affecting deprived and marginalized communities, including access to education, livelihood challenges, social discrimination, governance gaps, and

grassroots initiatives of change.

Importantly, UNHEARD VOICES has always gone beyond merely highlighting problems. Identifying practical solutions, policy perspectives, and community-led innovations has remained central to its editorial approach. The magazine strives to present research-informed narratives that encourage reform, dialogue, and action.

As we approach this important milestone of completing five years of publication, we believe it is an appropriate moment to reflect on the magazine's journey and evaluate its present direction and impact. Constructive introspection is essential for growth.

We have been occasionally receiving the feedback from readers. Being a regular reader of Unheard Voices, we seek your valuable feedback to help strengthen UNHEARD VOICES as it enters its sixth year of publication. We invite insights, suggestions, and thoughtful opinions on:

- 1) Content
- 2) Thematic focus
- 3) Presentation and Layout
- 4) Any particular column etc.

Your feedback will play a vital role in shaping the improvements we plan to implement. We request readers to share their views and recommendations at the email address provided. Together, with your continued support and engagement, UNHEARD VOICES will remain a credible platform for knowledge, dialogue, and empowerment in the years to come. Please share or send your suggestions on the following email: [uv@unheardvoices.co.in](mailto:uv@unheardvoices.co.in).

# A big hope: Increasing Participation of Marginalised students



Dr. S. Ramprabhu & Dr. D. Yuvaraj

National data from UDISE+ shows SC students consistently comprising around 18% of school enrolment and ST about 10%, reflecting near-universal access at elementary levels. In higher education, AISHE trends indicate SC's participation increased from 11.1% (2010-11) to 14.3% (2020-21), and ST from 4.2% to 5.8%, with recent analyses showing continued growth and near gender parity among these groups.

During the last two decades, India has experienced a measurable expansion in educational participation among students from marginalised communities, particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Using secondary data from the Unified District Information System for Education and the All India Survey on Higher Education, this study quantitatively examines trends in enrolment, dropout, and gender wise participation at the national level. The analysis shows that Scheduled Caste students consistently account for approximately 18 per cent of total school enrolment, while Scheduled Tribe students constitute about 10 per cent, indicating sustained inclusion in school education. However, UDISE plus data reveal clear stage wise disparities in retention, with dropout rates rising to around 14 per cent for Scheduled Caste students and more than 23 per cent for Scheduled Tribe students at the secondary level.

In higher education, AISHE data indicate an increase in the share of Scheduled Caste enrolment from 11.1 per cent in 2010 to 14.3 per cent in 2020, and a rise in Scheduled Tribe enrolment from 4.2 per cent to 5.8 per cent during the same period. Gender wise analysis further demonstrates near parity in higher education participation, with female students accounting for nearly half of total Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe enrolment. The findings quantitatively confirm that constitutional provisions, expansion of public educational institutions, and targeted welfare schemes such as scholarships, residential facilities, and fellowships have significantly enhanced access to education for



marginalised communities. Nevertheless, persistently high dropout rates at the secondary level and continuing concerns related to educational quality and employability indicate the need for focused policy interventions to ensure that increased participation translates into sustained educational and socio-economic outcomes.

### Introduction

Education functions as a critical instrument for social mobility and national development. In India, historical inequalities based on caste, tribe, gender, and economic status have restricted educational access for large sections of the population. Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), in particular, experienced systematic exclusion from formal education for decades. At the national level, official data from UDISE+ and the All India Survey on Higher Education indicate a steady increase in enrolment of students from marginalised communities across school and higher education over the last two decades (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2023). This paper analyses the reasons for this increase,

# AISHE

## All India Survey on Higher Education

evaluates its educational and social impact, and outlines future strategies to strengthen inclusive education across India.

### Reasons for the Increase in Student Participation

#### 1) Constitutional and Policy Framework

The Constitution of India provides a strong foundation for educational inclusion through provisions related to equality, affirmative action, and social justice. Reservation policies in educational institutions created structural opportunities for SC and ST students to access school, higher education, and professional courses (Government of India, 1950).

#### 2) Expansion of Public Education Infrastructure

The large-scale expansion of government schools, colleges, and universities improved physical access to education across rural and urban India. UDISE+ data show near-universal enrolment at the elementary level, including among SC and ST students, reflecting the success of universalisation efforts (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2023).

**Table 1: Growth of SC/ST Enrolment in School Education (National Level)**

Year	Total Enrolment (Million)	SC Enrolment (%)	ST Enrolment (%)
2005–06	Data not consistently published nationally by caste for this year	–	–
2010–11	–	–	–
2015–16	–	–	–
2019–20	264.5	~18–19 (estimate)	~10–11 (estimate)
2022–23	251.7	18%	~10%
2023–24	248.0	18%	9.9%

Source: UDISE+ official reports and national data summaries (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2023–24)

- Total enrollment figures for 2019–20 are based on UDISE+ report summaries showing over 26.45 crore (≈264.5 million) enrolled.
- The share (%) of SC and ST students at the national level for 2022–23 and 2023–24 is directly reported: 18% SC and ~9.9% ST of total enrolment in 2023–24.
- Comparable caste-wise percentages for earlier years (2005–06, 2010–11, 2015–16) are not officially published in the same consistent format publicly; Therefore, these cells are left blank in the absence of authoritative data.
- The enrolment percentages can be used to compute estimated numbers of SC/ST students (e.g., 18% of 248 million ≈ 44.6 million SC students, 9.9% of 248 million ≈ 24.6 million ST students in 2023–24).

### Government of India Welfare Schemes for SC and ST Students

A comprehensive framework of centrally sponsored welfare schemes significantly contributed to increased participation of SC and ST students across educational stages. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and the Ministry of Education implement these interventions.

The Pre Matric Scholarship Scheme and Post Matric Scholarship Scheme for SC and ST students reduced financial barriers at secondary and higher education levels by covering tuition fees, maintenance allowances, and compulsory charges. These schemes significantly improved retention and reduced dropout

among economically disadvantaged learners (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2022).

The National Overseas Scholarship Scheme enabled meritorious SC and ST students to pursue higher education abroad, promoting academic excellence and global exposure. Similarly, the Scheme of top-class education supported SC and ST students admitted to premier institutions such as IITs, IIMs, and central universities by covering full educational expenses.

Residential support through hostels for SC and ST students addressed geographical and safety barriers, particularly for students from rural and remote areas. For tribal students, Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) provided quality residential schooling in tribal-dominated regions, significantly improving access to secondary education (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, 2021).

In higher education, AISHE data indicate an increase in the share of Scheduled Caste enrolment from 11.1 per cent in 2010 to 14.3 per cent in 2020, and a rise in Scheduled Tribe enrolment from 4.2 per cent to 5.8 per cent during the same period. Gender wise analysis further demonstrates near parity in higher education participation, with female students accounting for nearly half of total Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe enrolment.

At the research level, National Fellowships and Junior Research Fellowships (JRF) ensured financial stability for SC and ST students pursuing MPhil and PhD programmes. The introduction of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanisms enhanced transparency, reduced delays, and strengthened trust in welfare delivery systems.

**Increased Social Awareness and Aspirations**

Rising literacy levels, improved awareness of educational rights, and visible socio-economic mobility among educated SC and ST individuals strengthened aspirations within marginalised communities. Education increasingly came to be viewed as a pathway to stable employment, dignity, and social inclusion.

**Impact of Increased Participation**

**1) Reduction in Educational Disparities**

The increased participation of SC and ST students narrowed long-standing gaps in enrolment and progression between social groups. UDISE+ indicators show improved transition rates from primary to secondary education among marginalised students at the national level (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2023).

**2) Improvement in Academic Outcomes**

Increased participation resulted in higher school completion rates and greater representation of SC and ST students in higher secondary and tertiary education. While regional variations persist, national trends indicate gradual improvement in academic outcomes among marginalised learners.

**3) Expansion of Higher Education Access**

AISHE data demonstrate a consistent rise in enrolment of SC and ST students in undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programmes across India. Welfare schemes and reservation policies collectively expanded access to universities, professional institutions, and research programmes (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022). AISHE data reveal a steady rise in the anticipation of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students in higher education over the last decade.

**Table 2: Enrolment of SC/ST Students in Higher Education (India)**

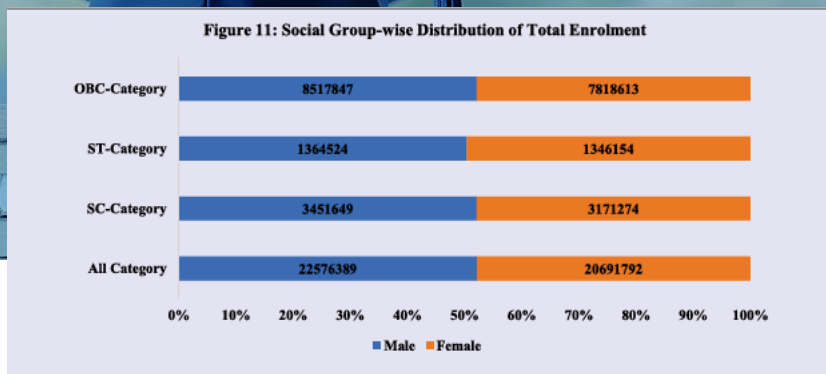
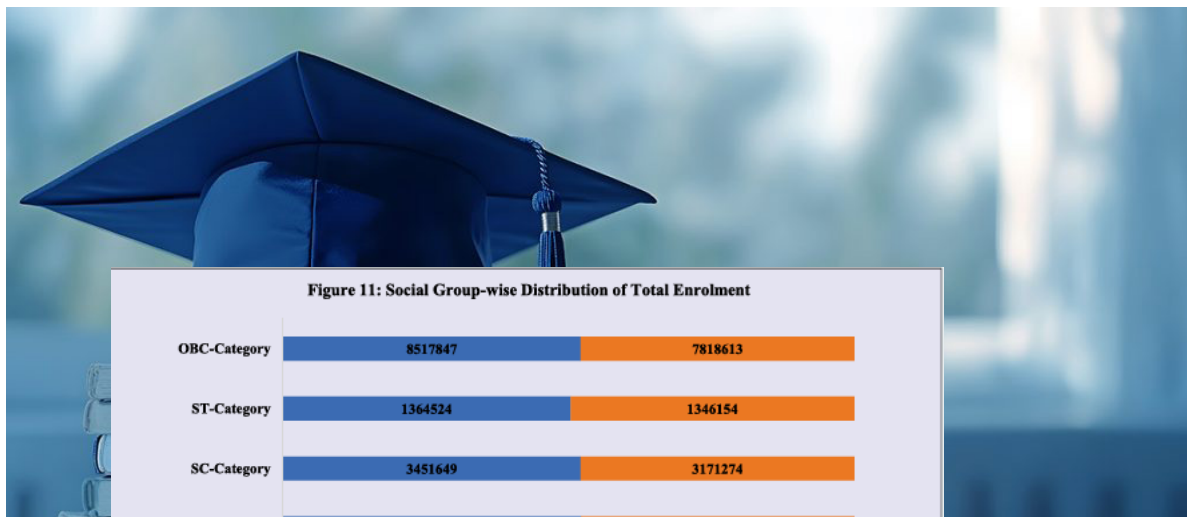
Year	Total HE Enrolment (Million)	SC (%)	ST (%)
2010–11	29.6	11.1	4.2
2015–16	34.6	11.8	4.6
2020–21	41.4	14.3	5.8

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), Ministry of Education, Government of India

The proportion of Scheduled Caste students in higher education increased from 11.1 per cent in 2010–11 to 14.3 per cent in 2020–21, while the share of Scheduled Tribe students rose from 4.2 per cent to 5.8 per cent during the same period. This upward trend reflects the cumulative impact of reservation policies, expanded institutional capacity, and targeted financial support schemes such as post-matric scholarships, fellowships, and fee reimbursement programmes.

**Social and Economic Mobility**

Education enabled SC and ST students to access skilled employment, public sector



Source : All India Survey on Higher Education 2021-22

jobs, and professional careers, contributing to intergenerational mobility and reduction of socio-economic vulnerability.

### Gender Equity Among Marginalised Communities

Targeted welfare schemes significantly increased enrolment and retention of girls from SC and ST communities. Improved educational participation among women delayed early marriage, enhanced health outcomes, and strengthened participation in economic and civic life. Gender-disaggregated AISHE data indicate a significant improvement in female participation among marginalised communities in higher education. Table 3 presents the gender-wise distribution of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students, highlighting near parity between male and female enrolment.

**Table 3: Gender-wise Enrolment among SC/ST Students in Higher Education (India)**

Social Category	Male (%)	Female (%)
Scheduled Castes (SC)	52.0	48.0
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	51.0	49.0

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), Ministry of Education, Government of India (2020–21).

The near-equal representation of male and female students among SC and ST communities reflects the positive impact of targeted scholarships, hostel facilities, and gender-sensitive welfare interventions. Increased female participation in higher education has

broader implications for delayed marriage, improved health outcomes, and enhanced socio-economic mobility.

### Way Forward

#### Improving Quality Alongside Access


Despite improved enrollment, learning outcomes remain uneven. Teacher training, curriculum reform, and learner-centred pedagogy must receive priority, particularly for first-generation learners.

#### Reducing Dropout at Secondary and Higher Levels

Dropout remains a critical challenge at secondary and tertiary stages. Strengthening mentoring systems, academic counselling, residential facilities, and financial continuity support is essential. Despite notable improvements in enrolment, dropout remains a significant concern at higher stages of schooling. National-level UDISE+ data indicate that dropout rates among SC and ST students rise sharply at the secondary level, particularly for Scheduled Tribe students, as shown in Table 4 (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022).

**Table 4: Dropout Rates of SC/ST Students by Level of Education (India)**

Level of Education	SC Dropout Rate (%)	ST Dropout Rate (%)
Primary (I–V)	1.6	3.2
Upper Primary (VI–VIII)	3.1	5.8
Secondary (IX–X)	14.0	23.4



Source: UDISE+ National Indicators, Ministry of Education, Government of India Reference Year: 2021–22 / 2022–23 (latest consolidated national data)

The sharp increase in dropout at the secondary stage highlights the persistence of structural barriers such as economic pressure, migration, language challenges, and limited access to quality secondary schools, particularly in tribal-dominated regions.

### **Strengthening Employability and Skill Alignment**

Formal education must align with labour market demands. Vocational education, skill development initiatives, internships, and industry partnerships are necessary to translate access into employment outcomes.

#### **Bridging the Digital Divide**

Digital learning has become integral to education delivery. Ensuring equitable access to digital devices, connectivity, and digital literacy is essential to prevent new forms of exclusion among marginalised students.

#### **Evidence-Based Policy Monitoring**

Regular use of national data systems such as UDISE+ and AISHE will support evidence-based policymaking. Continuous monitoring of enrolment, retention, and outcomes will help refine interventions and target the most disadvantaged learners.

#### **Findings**

The analysis of national-level secondary data from UDISE+ and the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reveals a sustained expansion in the participation of students from marginalised communities in both school and higher education in India. First, school education data indicate that Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students constitute a significant and stable proportion of total enrolment at the national level. As shown in Table 1, SC students account for nearly one-fifth of total school enrolment, while ST students represent approximately one-tenth. This reflects the success of universalisation policies, expansion of public schooling, and constitutional safeguards aimed at ensuring equitable access to education, and second, dropout patterns reveal a clear stage-wise disparity. Table 2 demonstrates that dropout rates among SC and ST students remain relatively low at the primary and upper-primary levels but increase sharply at the secondary stage, particularly for ST students. This finding highlights persistent structural challenges such as economic vulnerability, migration, language barriers, limited access to quality secondary schools in remote areas,

and early entry into the labour market. Third, higher education data from AISHE confirm a steady rise in the participation of SC and ST students over the past decade. As presented in Table 3, the share of SC students in higher education increased from 11.1 per cent in 2010–11 to 14.3 per cent in 2020–21, while the proportion of ST students rose from 4.2 per cent to 5.8 per cent during the same period.

This growth underscores the cumulative impact of reservation policies, post-matric scholarships, fellowships, fee reimbursement schemes, and institutional expansion, and fourth, gender-wise analysis reveals significant progress towards parity within marginalised communities. Table 4 indicates near-equal participation of male and female students among both SC and ST groups in higher education. This finding reflects the effectiveness of gender-focused interventions, including scholarships for girls, residential facilities, and awareness initiatives promoting female education. Overall, the findings demonstrate that India has made substantial progress in expanding educational access for marginalised communities. However, the persistence of higher dropout rates at secondary levels and ongoing concerns related to quality and employability suggest that access alone is insufficient. Sustained policy focus on retention, learning outcomes, and post-education opportunities is essential to translate increased participation into long-term social and economic mobility.

#### **Conclusion**

India has made substantial progress in increasing educational participation among marginalised communities through constitutional safeguards, expansion of public education, and comprehensive SC/ST welfare schemes. Official national-level data confirm improved access, retention, and representation of marginalised students in school and higher education. Sustained policy commitment focusing on quality, equity, and employability remains essential to consolidate these gains. Education must continue to function as a powerful instrument of social transformation and inclusive national development.

*Dr. S. Ramprabhu, Principal, Kaamadhenu College of Education, Sathyamangalam, Erode DT, Tamil Nadu.*

*Dr. D. Yuvaraj, Associate Professor, Government College of Education for Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Sant Ravidas's concept of "Begumpura" is a remarkable example of deep ideological maturity. Unfortunately, there are many misconceptions surrounding this idea. The vision of Begumpura stands as strong evidence of how far ahead of his time Sant Ravidas was. His concept reflects the profound richness of India's intellectual and philosophical heritage. The history of the Indian subcontinent is not merely a chronicle of dynasties and wars, but a long process of social and spiritual churning. The contribution of the medieval Bhakti Movement to this process serves as a foundation for the construction of modern India. As noted in the January 2026 issue of the research journal *Unheard Voices*, the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in Ayodhya should be viewed not merely through a political lens, but as an expression of "Social Cohesion" and "National Regeneration."



Aniket J.



## Sant Ravidas's Begumpura: An Manifestation of authentic Indian thoughts

The inspiration for social harmony and equality is found in the philosophy of the 15th-century Sant Ravidas, particularly in his concept of Begumpura. Today, the term is often misinterpreted. Some believe it means "City of the Queen," while others assume it to be a foreign or Islamic concept due to its Persian-Arabic vocabulary. However, Begumpura translates to Be-gum-pura — the City Without Sorrow — an indigenous Indian vision articulated well before Thomas More's Utopia. Furthermore, the Urdu or Hindustani language found in Sant Ravidas's speech is not foreign; it is a language that emerged organically from the Indian subcontinent. Table Of Contents 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. Analytical View News at Glance By The Numbers Academic Insight Social Media Pulse On Our

### Reading List

#### Analytical View Historical context: Bhakti movement and social evolution

To understand 'Begumpura,' one must understand 15th-century India, a time of the Lodhi dynasty and early Mughal incursions. Society was shackled by rigid caste discrimination and untouchability. In such times, Sant Ravidas, born into the so-called 'untouchable' Chamar community, forged a new path. India did not import the idea of equality from Europe; it developed organically through centuries of spiritual reforms. Sant Ravidas moved God out of the temples and established Him in the hearts of the common people and their manual labour. His famous saying, "Man Changa To Kathouti Mein Ganga" (If the heart is pure, the Ganges

is in your wooden tub), is a testament to this.

'Begumpura' was not just about spiritual liberation; it was a "Symbolic Rebellion" against the exploitation of the time. He imagined a state where there is no king, no tax, and no fear. Etymology of Begumpura and Rebuttal of the Queens City Theory The line "Begumpura sahar ko nau" often confuses readers. Let's look at the philological analysis: 1. Be-gam vs. Begum: o Be-gam: From Persian / Hindustani. 'Gam' means sorrow / pain; 'Be' is a prefix meaning without. Together: "Without Sorrow." o Begum: A Turkish root word used in the Mughal era meaning "Queen."

### Why it is NOT "City of the Queen?"

Contextual evidence: Ravidas says, "Dukhu andohu nahi tihi thau" (There is no grief or anxiety there). A "Queen's City" would describe palaces and jewels; Ravidas describes the absence of sorrow.

Political evidence: Monarchy involves taxes. Ravidas explicitly says, "Na tasvis khiraju na malu" (No worry of taxes, no greed for property). A royal city cannot be tax free.

Grammatical evidence: In the 'Sadhukkadi' dialect of the saints, prefixing 'Be' to 'Gham' was a common linguistic tool, similar to 'Be-fikr' (Carefree). Urdu/Hindustani as an Indigenous Indian Language Sant Ravidas used words like khiraj, khauf, khata, zaval, and abadan. While some reject these as "foreign," this stems from historical ignorance. Sadhukkadi (Saint Language): Saints travelled and spoke to the masses—farmers and laborers. Their language was a blend of Sanskrit, Braj, Avadhi, Khari Boli, and Persian-Arabic. This was not the adoption of a foreign culture but the "Indianization" of language. Indigenous origins: Linguistically, Urdu's grammar is entirely Indian (based on Shauraseni Prakrit). Ravidas proved that language is not a slave to religion. He combined Persian (Be-gam) with Sanskrit (Pura) to create a masterpiece of India's Composite Culture. Comparative Study: 'Begumpura' vs. Western 'Utopia' Sir Thomas More wrote Utopia in 1516. Sant Ravidas (approx. 1377–1528) preceded him. This means an Indian Dalit saint envisioned an ideal society long before the West.

Sant Ravidas's 'Begumpura' (15th Century) Thomas More's 'Utopia' (16th Century) Origin Lived experience of social exploitation rooted in the Bhakti movement Product of the European Renaissance and Humanist thought Governance Stateless moral order guided by divine justice; absence of hierarchy Highly regulated state with strict laws and civic discipline Freedom Absolute freedom — "Go where the heart desires" Property Complete absence of private property

and material greed Equality Absolute social equality — "No second, no third" Restricted freedom; travel requires official permission Collective ownership of property; proto-communist structure Hierarchical society; acceptance of slavery Begumpura, Ramrajya, and Vaikuntha Ramrajya is an ethical term. Life of Prabhu Ramchandra indicates social cohesion, equality and fraternity. His life has no space for any discrimination. Begumpura is Casteless and Classless. Vaikuntha is often seen as an afterlife.

Ravidas however, describes a "Sahar" (City). He was an urban thinker who, much like Dr. B.R.



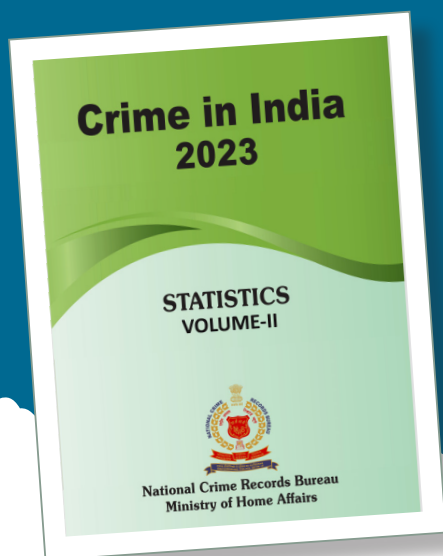
Ambedkar later would, saw the city as a place of liberation compared to the caste ridden village. 'Begumpura' is a golden chapter in India's socio-political history.

1. It is a city of liberation, not a city of a queen.
2. It is an Indigenous Utopia that predates Western concepts.
3. It represents Fraternity, a core principle later enshrined in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.

Today, at a time when societies across the world are grappling with widening inequality, social fragmentation, and moral anxiety, Sant Ravidas's vision of Begumpura offers a profoundly humane alternative. It imagines a social order free from fear, discrimination, and decline—where dignity is intrinsic, not negotiated. In this sense, Begumpura stands as a spiritual and philosophical precursor to Rabindranath Tagore's evocative ideal of a nation "where the mind is without fear."

*Author is Pune based Journalist  
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*

# NCRB Report on Atrocities Cases



With more than 57,000 cases annually, the persistence of atrocities remains a serious social challenge. The data should serve not as a tool for simplistic conclusions, but as a starting point for deeper analysis, informed policymaking, and sustained efforts toward social harmony and justice.

Vijendra

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data on cases registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act between 2018 and 2023 presents a complex and often contested picture of caste-based violence in India. At first glance, the numbers suggest a steady rise in reported atrocities over five years, followed by a relative plateau in 2023. However, interpreting this trend requires caution.

The challenge is to understand what this data genuinely reflects—an increase in violence, improved access to justice, systemic reporting limitations, or a combination of all three.

### Data at a Glance

According to NCRB records, cases registered under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act have risen as follows:

- 2018: 42,747 cases
- 2019: 45,876 cases
- 2020: 50,202 cases
- 2021: 50,744 cases
- 2022: 57,428 cases
- 2023: 57,627 cases

Between 2018 and 2022, the data shows a near-linear increase, averaging around 4,000–5,000 additional cases annually. In contrast, 2023 records a marginal rise of just under 200 cases compared to 2022, marking a clear departure from the earlier pattern.

### Understanding Rise (2018–2022)

The steady growth in registered cases between 2018 and 2022 can be interpreted in multiple, not mutually exclusive, ways.


One interpretation is that caste-based violence and discrimination against Scheduled

Castes and Scheduled Tribes have continued unabated, and in some regions intensified. Structural inequalities related to land ownership, access to resources, political assertion, and social mobility often generate friction, particularly in rural areas. As Dalit and Adivasi communities increasingly assert their rights—whether through education, political participation, or legal mechanisms—conflicts may become more visible and confrontational.

Another interpretation focuses on improved reporting and registration. Over the last decade, there has been greater public awareness of the SC/ST Act, aided by civil society activism, judicial scrutiny, and media attention. Supreme Court interventions clarifying the scope of the Act, along with state-level monitoring mechanisms, may have encouraged victims to come forward. In this view, rising numbers do not necessarily indicate a worsening social situation, but rather a gradual correction of historical underreporting.

A third factor lies in institutional behaviour. Police and administrative officials, under pressure from courts and governments, may have become more diligent in registering cases under the Act instead of diverting them to less stringent sections of the Indian Penal Code. This would naturally inflate the number of cases under the Atrocities Act without implying a proportional rise in incidents.

The sharp increase between 2020 and 2022 is particularly noteworthy. This period coincides with heightened social stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic disruption, migration, and competition over scarce



resources. Social tensions often surface more sharply during such periods, especially among vulnerable communities.

### **2023 Plateau: A Turning Point or Statistical Noise?**

The marginal increase in 2023—only about 200 cases—stands out against the previous trend. This apparent plateau has prompted varied interpretations.

One optimistic reading is that policy interventions and policing measures may be beginning to show results. Increased monitoring, faster investigation, community-level interventions, and awareness campaigns could have had a stabilizing effect. In some states, special courts, exclusive public prosecutors, and district-level review committees have been strengthened, potentially contributing to deterrence.

However, an equally plausible explanation lies in reporting saturation and systemic barriers. Despite legal safeguards, many victims still face intimidation, social pressure, economic dependence, and procedural hurdles when attempting to register cases. In areas where reporting has already reached a relatively high level, further increases may be constrained not by reduced violence but by persistent obstacles within the justice system.

There is also the possibility of administrative or statistical factors. NCRB data depends on information supplied by state police forces. Variations in classification practices, delays in filing First Information Reports (FIRs), or changes in internal reporting protocols can affect year-to-year comparisons. Without detailed disaggregated data—such as district-wise trends, conviction rates, or pendency—it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from a single year's slowdown.

### **High Absolute Numbers: Structural Reality**

Regardless of how trends are interpreted, the absolute numbers remain substantial. Over 57,000 cases in a single year represent a significant burden on the criminal justice system and a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by SC and ST communities.

It is also important to note that NCRB data reflects cases registered, not cases resolved. Conviction rates under the SC/ST Act have historically remained low, while pendency remains high. For many victims, justice is delayed or denied, reinforcing cycles of mistrust and disengagement from legal processes. Moreover, the Act covers a wide range of offences— from verbal abuse and social boycott to grievous violence. Aggregate numbers do not distinguish between the severity or context

of cases, making qualitative interpretation essential.

### **Competing Narratives Around Data**

Public discourse around these figures often becomes polarized.

Some argue that rising numbers demonstrate the failure of governance and law enforcement to protect marginalized communities. From this perspective, the data underscores the need for stricter enforcement, police accountability, and social reform.

Others contend that the increase reflects greater legal awareness and empowerment, and that higher registration is a sign of institutional responsiveness rather than social decline. They caution against equating higher case counts with deteriorating law and order.

A third viewpoint emphasizes the risk of misinterpretation and politicization. Critics point out that crime statistics can be selectively cited without context, either to downplay social problems or to exaggerate them for political ends. Balanced analysis requires acknowledging both the persistence of caste-based injustice and the limitations of statistical tools.

### **Policy Implications and Way Forward**

The 2023 plateau should not be interpreted as evidence of declining caste-based violence. Equally, it should not be dismissed as meaningless. Instead, it should prompt deeper, more nuanced inquiry.

#### **Policy responses must focus on:**

- Strengthening reporting mechanisms, including victim protection, witness support, and legal aid.
- Improving police training and accountability, ensuring consistent application of the Act across regions.
- Enhancing data transparency, with better disaggregation and timely publication to enable informed analysis.
- Addressing structural inequalities, such as land access, education, and employment, which underlie many conflicts.
- Investing in qualitative research, to capture lived experiences that numbers alone cannot convey.

The NCRB data from 2018 to 2023 reveals a sustained rise in registered cases under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, followed by a notable slowdown in 2023. While the plateau may appear encouraging on the surface, it is more likely a reflection of reporting dynamics, administrative factors, or systemic constraints rather than a definitive reduction in caste-based violence.

*uv@unheardvoices.co.in*

# Contribution of Matua Community to Freedom Movement

Raktim Das



In the final phase of colonial rule in India, the Matua community emerged as an irresistible social force in Bengal—educationally awakened, engaged in government services, and politically influential. The current of the nineteenth-century Bengal renaissance failed to influence the lower castes. At this historical juncture, Harichand Thakur was born into a Namasudra peasant family in Safaldanga, Faridpur district. Through the establishment of the “Matua Samaj,” he presented a new ideal before the oppressed lower castes. After his death, his son Guruchand Thakur transformed the Namasudra movement into a powerful and expansive socio-religious reform movement.



## Beginning of Militant Phase of Matua Movement

Around 1833, at the age of about twenty-one, Harichand Thakur came into conflict with local zamindars and social elites and left his birthplace Safaldanga to settle in Orakandi. He was already aware of how zamindars plundered poor peasants. But after coming here, he realized the true secret behind their luxury and opulence. With provisions for only three months, they extracted a whole year’s hard labour from peasants. They forced them into bonded labour. They even sold poor farmers in slave markets. Around 1846, the abolition of this slave trade became the first major success of the Matua’s.

A strange custom called “selling punishment” existed in Bengal. When elite zamindars were involved in cases of murder or robbery, Dalits and outcast people were tempted or threatened into taking the blame upon themselves to save the zamindars. Under Harichand Thakur’s leadership, a movement began against this evil practice and also against human sacrifice, because at that time it was people from backward communities like the Namasudras who were victims of such sacrifices.

Though Harichand Thakur was a fierce opponent of caste discrimination, he never considered the philosophy he propagated to be outside Hinduism. He said, “Matua philosophy is the subtle Sanatan (eternal) Hindu doctrine.” He was a strong opponent of religious conversion. Matua’s regard Harichand Thakur as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and many consider Guruchand Thakur an incarnation of Mahakal Parameshwar Shiva. This makes it clear that there was never any conflict between the Matua community and Hinduism, nor any intention to establish a new religion separate from it. The principal scripture of the Matua’s is Shri Shri Harililamrita, which says:



“Ram is Hari, Krishna is Hari, Hari is Gaurachand.

All Haris together are the complete Harichand.”

The Matua’s have a flag. It is a triangular red flag bordered with white. Red symbolizes revolution or continuous struggle for progress, and white symbolizes peace—peace through revolution based on equality and coexistence. Their aim was to establish equality by removing untouchability, inequality, superstition, inhumanity, and social discrimination.

The instruments used by the Matua’s are the joy-danka (drum), kansar, and horn. Just as the Matua flag symbolizes revolution and victory, these instruments spread the proclamation of victory and rouse the masses. Matua gosains and leaders carry a staff about one and a quarter cubits long called a “chhota.” They walk in front holding it, followed by devotees. They carry the red-and-white flag and wear garlands of coconut shells.

### **The Matua’s in the Struggle for Religious Survival**

Guruchand realized:

“A community without an organization has no strength; a community without a king has no vitality.”

His call was: “If you gain education, fear no one, beg at no one’s door.

You will gain political power and your suffering will end; time will test this.”

During Guruchand Thakur’s time, conflicts occurred between Namasudras and jihadist Muslims and Christian missionaries. Among the most notable was the Padmabil riot of 1923. On Harichand Thakur’s birthday, under Guruchand Thakur’s leadership, Matua’s repelled jihadist Muslim attackers and fought to preserve their existence. Padmabil was filled with the bodies of jihadists. The number of corpses was so great that they were buried beneath layers of grass in the wetland. That night, by Guruchand Thakur’s miraculous power, heavy rain caused the grass and water level to rise, so when police arrived the next day, they found no trace of the riot (Padmabil Kajia: Bangalir Muktijuddher Antarale, Sheikh Mujib—Kalidas Baidya, pp. 76–78). It is said that the then Governor Lord Lytton visited to review the incident, though there is no mention in official reports. News spread throughout southern Bengal. From that bloody struggle, it can be assumed that there was not harmony but deep hostility between Muslims and Matua’s, and that Namasudras became a protective shield for Hindus.

Again, in 1947 in Pirojpur, Barisal, jihadists obstructed Saraswati Puja. The Namasudra leaders ensured the puja continued smoothly

till immersion.

In southern East Bengal, Guruchand Thakur stood as a barrier against Christian missionary conversion. Australian Baptist missionary Dr. C. S. Mead came to Orakandi to convert Matua’s. But Guruchand, through his sharp intellect, instead made Dr. Mead his admirer and ally. Instead of converting Matua’s, Dr. Mead carried out many development works for them. With his cooperation and advice, Guruchand successfully undertook many revolutionary initiatives.

Guruchand Thakur and Swami Pranavananda Maharaj, founder of Bharat Sevashram Sangha, were contemporaries and both played important roles in protecting Hinduism from Christian and Muslim aggression. They remained in contact. It is undeniable that Matua’s are an integral part of Hindu society. Observing the strength of the Namasudras, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee called them a “martial race” and wanted them deployed for border security. With his support, Pramatha Ranjan Thakur established “Thakurnagar” in North 24 Parganas, near the East Pakistan border, which became the Matua headquarters.

### **Indigo Revolt and Tebhaga Movement**

In 1858 the peasant revolt and in 1859–60 the Indigo Revolt occurred. Zamindars allied with the British brutally oppressed peasants. Harichand Thakur led this revolt. In Chaugachha, Jessore, Vishnu Charan Biswas and Digambar Biswas led the uprising. Armed with spears and sticks, Matua’s attacked indigo factories, destroyed them, and stopped indigo cultivation. From 1872–76 peasants attacked oppressive zamindars under Guruchand Thakur’s leadership. It was not communists but Guruchand Thakur who first initiated the “Tebhaga Movement” in 1880, demanding two-thirds of produce for sharecroppers. He continued till 1909. It spread across India. In 1922, a massive peasant rally in Pirojpur adopted the demand for land reforms. In 1921, Namasudra MLAs Bishmadeb Das and Nirad Bihari Mallick passed laws demanding land rights.

Guruchand toured districts organizing conferences to awaken oppressed peasants. He became known as Rajarshi Guruchand Thakur. Congress leaders like Ambika Charan Mazumdar, Surendranath Banerjee, and Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das invited him to join movements like Swadeshi and Non-Cooperation. He refused, replying in verse that upper castes only sought lower castes for their own interests.

After his death, a memorial meeting was held in 1938 at Albert Hall, Kolkata, chaired by J. C. Gupta, with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as chief guest. Dr. C. S. Mead wrote that



he had never seen among orthodox Hindus a man so farsighted, sharp-minded, and fiery. Netaji called him a “Mahamanab” (great soul). Mahatma Gandhi called him a “great guru.”

#### **Thakur Family in the Freedom Struggle**

Members of the Thakur family joined the freedom movement, though little is written. Nagendranath and Mahendranath Thakur joined the Swadeshi movement. Nagendranath spoke at the 1925 Faridpur Congress conference before Gandhi and C.R. Das, representing Namasudras. He participated in the 1928 Calcutta Congress session. He was associated with Netaji Subhas Bose, Sarojini Naidu, Rajendra Prasad, Motilal Nehru, and Jawaharlal Nehru. Mahendranath joined the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and was imprisoned for six months in Dum Dum jail.

#### **Entry of Matua’s into the Bengal Legislative Assembly**

Guruchand believed politics was the highest policy for establishing justice. He urged followers to enter legislative assemblies. In 1921, Bhishmadeb Das became the first Namasudra MLA. He raised issues of depressed classes. By 1937, 32 backward-caste representatives were elected from Bengal, 12 of them Namasudras, including Jogendranath Mandal, Birat Chandra Mandal, and Pramatha Ranjan Thakur. Many joined Ambedkar’s Dalit movement.

#### **Growth of Hindutva Among Namasudras**

Hindu organizations like Hindu Mission, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, and especially Hindu Mahasabha worked among Namasudras. By 1944, Mahasabha had dozens of rural branches. Their efforts reflected in communal conflicts of the 1940s, where Namasudras increasingly identified as Hindus. In 1946–47, many Namasudras supported the creation of West Bengal within India.

Most Scheduled Caste MLAs voted for partition except Jogendranath Mandal. Later, betrayed in Pakistan, Mandal resigned and returned to India. An article in Ananta Bijoy Patrika described Pramatha Ranjan Thakur’s

tours and speeches calling for Hindu unity under leaders like Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Savarkar. Ultimately, both sides were deceived, and large sections of Namasudras were forced to become refugees in India.

The Matua community’s role in India’s freedom struggle reflects the extraordinary courage and resilience of a marginalized group that rose to challenge oppression and injustice. Beginning with Harichand Thakur’s establishment of the Matua Samaj, the movement sought to empower the Namasudra peasants through social reform, education, and unity. His son Guruchand Thakur expanded this vision, transforming it into a powerful socio-religious and political force that resisted zamindari exploitation, religious conversions, and colonial dominance. Their activism was not limited to spiritual awakening but extended into militant resistance, peasant revolts, and pioneering demands for land reforms through the Tebhaga movement.

The Matua philosophy emphasized equality, dignity, and coexistence, inspiring oppressed communities to assert their rights and identity. Their entry into legislative assemblies and participation in nationalist movements demonstrated their growing political consciousness. Leaders like Guruchand Thakur, Nagendranath, and Mahendranath Thakur connected with national figures including Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi, ensuring that the voices of the marginalized were heard in the broader struggle for independence.

Ultimately, the Matua contribution highlights how India’s freedom was shaped not only by elite leaders but also by grassroots movements of oppressed communities. Their legacy continues to inspire efforts toward justice, equality, and social harmony in modern India.

*Author is Journalist and Researcher from West Bengal  
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



The Modi government continues to appreciate and encourage people from deprived communities by honouring them Padma awards. This has great social impact. Padma awards, till few years back, was considered as 'elitist' matter. This tradition has been broken now. People from deprived communities from all corners of nation are honoured, strengthening oneness of the country. It is also enriching local traditions, allowing them blossom in free atmosphere.



## Honouring Neglected with Padma Awards

### Team UV



#### 1) Techi Gubin (Nyishi)

Shri Techi Gubin, an eminent social worker and a respected leader of the Nyishi community, devoted his life to safeguarding indigenous faith and nurturing the spirit of national unity. His vision was not just about preserving traditions, but about weaving them into the larger fabric of India's identity. One of his most inspiring contributions was leading people from more than 90 border villages to proudly hoist the Indian Tricolour—a gesture that became a living symbol of patriotism, solidarity, and service to the nation. His journey reminds us that true leadership lies in bringing people together, strengthening bonds, and instilling pride in both heritage and country.



#### 2) Taga Ram Bheel (Bheel Community)

Taga Ram Bheel, the celebrated folk musician from Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, has brought the soul of desert melodies to life through his art. Honoured with the Padma Shri in 2026, he is best known for his mastery of the Algoza—two wooden flutes played together in harmony. His music flows seamlessly thanks to his rare gift of circular breathing, which lets him weave endless, uninterrupted tunes that feel as timeless as the desert winds. Alongside the Algoza, he also plays the flute and the matka (clay pot), turning simple instruments into vessels of deep emotion.



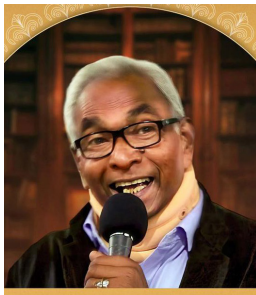
### 3) Sarat Kumar Patra (Santali Community – Tribe)

Born into a humble family of weavers in Tigiria, Cuttack, Patra grew up with the rhythm of the loom and the colors of handwoven fabric shaping his world. With quiet dedication, he revived forgotten dyeing techniques and created over 50 shades of natural dyes, each carrying the patience and love of heritage. His fabrics — whether sarees, dhotis, or scarves in cotton, silk, and bapta—are treasured across India, even adorning Lord Jagannath in Puri during festivals. Patra’s true gift lies not only in his artistry but in the lives, he has touched, training more than a hundred young weavers from disadvantaged backgrounds to carry forward this legacy. His devotion has earned him the National Award, the Sant Kabir Award, and international recognition, culminating in the Padma Award in 2026. His journey is one of resilience—of weaving tradition, dignity, and pride into every strand.



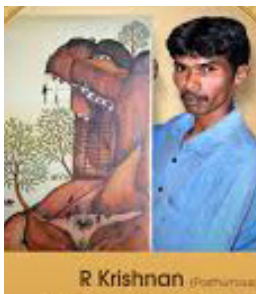
### 4) Sangyusang S. Pongener (Naga- Tribe)

Sangyusang S. Pongener, an Ao Naga folk artist and composer from Ungma village in Mokokchung, Nagaland, has dedicated his life to keeping the rich traditions of his people alive. Through music, folk dramas, and community performances, he has worked tirelessly to preserve and share the cultural heritage of the Ao Naga tribe. His devotion to teaching and promoting indigenous art has inspired generations, earning him the Padma Shri in 2026 for his contributions to the world of art.



### 5) Rabilal Tudu (Santali Community – Tribe)

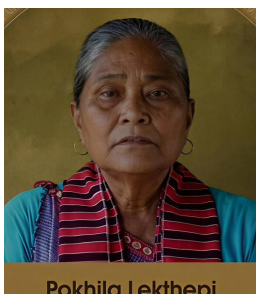
Rabilal Tudu, born in 1949 in Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal, carries the proud heritage of the Santal community. A banker by profession, he never let go of his true calling—nurturing Santali language and literature. Over the years, he became one of the most respected voices in Santali writing, with his play Parsi Khatir earning the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2015. In 2026, his lifelong devotion to literature and education was recognized with the Padma Shri. Through his words and mentorship, Tudu has ensured that Santali culture continues to thrive, inspiring generations to take pride in their language and identity.



R Krishnan (Pothuruzha)

### 6) Shri R Krishnan (Alu Kurumba- ST)

R Krishnan, lovingly known as Kidna, was the cultural torchbearer of the Alu Kurumbar tribal community in the Nilgiris. From his grandfather, he learned the ancient “Ezhuthu Paarai” rock-art tradition and spent over three decades reviving it, adapting temple wall paintings onto canvas. Using natural pigments from leaves, life, rituals, and the living landscape of the Nilgiris. Krishnan’s passing in April 2025 marked the end of a remarkable journey, but his legacy endures—an artist who rescued a 3,000-year-old tradition from extinction and gave it new life for generations to cherish.



Pokhila Lekhtepi

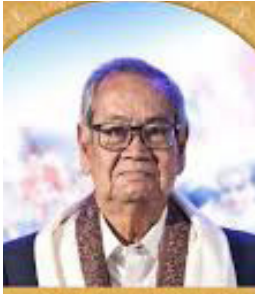
### 7) Pokhila Lekhtepi (ST)

Pokhila Lekhtepi, a renowned folk singer from Assam selected for the Padma Shri Award 2026, belongs to the Karbi community. She is recognized as a veteran Karbi folk artist and is often referred to as the Queen of Melody within the Karbi music industry. She hails from the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. She was born in Dupar Timung village, near Dokmoka in Karbi Anglon. She has dedicated over four decades to preserving and promoting traditional Karbi folk music.



### 8) Dr. Padma Gurmet (ST)

Dr. Padma Gurmet of Ladakh, honored with the Padma Shri in 2026, has devoted his life to preserving and promoting Sowa-Rigpa, the ancient Himalayan system of medicine. Rooted in Ladakhi Buddhist culture and trained at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Leh, he combined deep tradition with modern practice. As Director of the National Institute of Sowa Rigpa, he has guided research, healing, and education, ensuring that this centuries-old wisdom continues to serve people today. His journey reflects both devotion to heritage and a commitment to the well-being of future generations.



### 9) Naresh Chandra Dev Varma (ST)

Naresh Chandra Dev Varma, a renowned Kokborok writer and Padma Shri awardee of 2026, carries the proud legacy of the Tripuri people of Tripura. Belonging to the Debbarma clan—one of the nine major clans of the Tripuri tribe and historically linked to the royal lineage of the Kingdom of Tripura—he has devoted his life to enriching Kokborok literature. His work is not only a celebration of language but also a way of preserving the cultural identity of his community. Recognized as a voice of heritage and resilience, Varma's contributions continue to inspire pride among the Tripuri people and strengthen the place of Kokborok in India's literary landscape.



### 10) Professor Mahendra Nath Roy (SC)

Professor Mahendra Nath Roy, a distinguished chemist from North Bengal University, was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2026 for his remarkable contributions to education and science. Belonging to the Koch Rajbongshi community, he is often remembered as the "son of a farmer" who rose to become a respected academic leader. Over the years, he served as Dean of Sciences at NBU and later as the founding Vice-Chancellor of Alipurduar University, shaping institutions with vision and dedication. His journey reflects resilience, humility, and an unwavering commitment to knowledge—an unsung hero who carried the pride of his community into the world of higher education.



### 11) Dr. Jogesh Deuri (ST)

Dr. Jogesh Deuri of Assam, fondly known as the "Eri Silk Pioneer," has devoted his life to transforming sericulture into a source of pride and empowerment for rural and tribal communities. A native of Daranggiri in Goalpara district and a member of the Deori community, he rose to become Director of the Assam Sericulture Department, where his vision helped establish the Bodoland Silk Park. Through his work in the Bodoland Territorial Council region, he not only preserved the tradition of Eri silk but also created livelihoods and dignity for countless families. His journey reflects the power of heritage, innovation, and service to society.

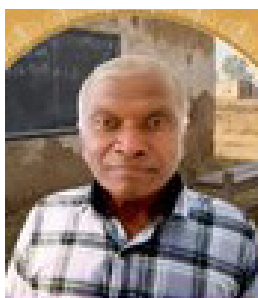


### 12) Hally War (ST)

Hally War, a 69-year-old resident of Siej village near Sohra in Meghalaya, has spent more than five decades shaping and caring for the living room bridges that define the heritage of the War Khasi people. Beginning at the age of 10 under the guidance of his grandfather, he mastered this indigenous bioengineering tradition—training roots to grow into strong, natural structures that connect communities across the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills. His work on bridges like the



Umkar Living Root Bridge has become a symbol of sustainability, resilience, and cultural pride. In 2026, his lifelong devotion to preserving this unique craft was honoured with the Padma Shri, ensuring his legacy as a guardian of both nature and tradition.



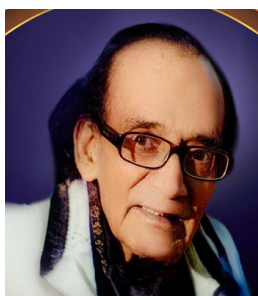
### 13) Charan Hembram (Santhali ST)

Charan Hembram, born in 1952 in Nuagaon, Mayurbhanj, Odisha, has spent his life as a guardian of Santali language and culture. A celebrated author and composer, he is often described as a sentinel of his community's identity. Through his tireless efforts, he promoted the Ol Chiki script, set up Santali education centres known as Ol Itun Asras, and worked to free his people from the grip of superstition. His writings and initiatives have given generations of Santals the tools to embrace their heritage with pride. In recognition of this lifelong devotion to literature and education, he was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2026, a tribute to his role in keeping the voice of his community alive and strong.



### 14) Budhri Tati (ST)

Budri Tati, affectionately known as Badi Didi (Elder Sister), is a beacon of hope in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh. From her home in Hiranar village, Dantewada, she has spent more than four decades walking through remote, Naxal-affected villages, carrying with her a mission of change. Her work has touched countless lives—empowering women, promoting education, fighting addiction, and improving healthcare in communities often left behind. Through her tireless efforts, over 500 women have become self-reliant, finding dignity and strength in their own hands. Budri Tati's journey is not just one of service, but of courage and compassion, proving how one determined woman can transform the lives of many.



### 15) Bishwa Bandhu (Dom, SC)

Bishwa Bandhu, the legendary folk dancer and Guru from Bihar, devoted his life to giving dignity and recognition to the traditional Domkach dance. Born into the Dom community, he carried forward an art form often confined to village weddings in the Magadh and Mithila regions, and transformed it into a celebrated stage performance. In 1959, he founded Surangan, an institution that became the heart of his mission to revive and sustain folk arts. Over the decades, he performed more than 6,000 times across India and abroad, breaking barriers of stigma and prejudice, and showing the world the richness of his community's heritage. His passing on March 30, 2025, at the age of 95, marked the end of an era—but his legacy lives on in every rhythm of Domkach, reminding us of the power of art to preserve identity and inspire pride.



### 16) Bhiklya Ladakya Dhinda (Warli Tribal Community, ST)

Bhiklya Ladakya Dhinda, a 92-year-old artist from Jawhar in Maharashtra's Palghar district, has spent his entire life breathing life into the soulful notes of the Tarpa, a traditional wind instrument crafted from bottle gourd and bamboo. As a fourth generation Tarpa player, he carried forward not just a musical tradition, but the heartbeat of Warli tribal culture—where the Tarpa is more than seven decades, Dhinda has kept this 400-year-old art alive, teaching and inspiring others while remaining deeply rooted in his heritage. Often called an "unsung hero," his quiet dedication ensured that the music of the Tarpa continues to echo across generations, preserving the identity and spirit of his people.



### 17) Asok Kumar Haldar (SC)

Asok Kumar Haldar from Malda, West Bengal, has lived a life that beautifully blends humility with purpose. Once a railway guard, he never let his profession limit his deeper calling—to write, to educate, and to inspire change. Belonging to the Dalit community, he used his pen and his voice to highlight social transformation and awaken human consciousness. Beyond literature, he has been a tireless social worker, standing up for dignity and equality, and serving as the state general secretary of the Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Academy. His journey is a testament to resilience and commitment—showing how one man, rooted in his community, can use words and action to uplift many lives.



### 18) Ashok Khade (SC)

Ashok Khade, born in Ped village of Sangli district, Maharashtra, embodies the story of resilience and determination. Coming from a humble Dalit family—his father a cobbler and his mother a daily-wage labour—he grew up amidst hardship but never let poverty define his future. Starting out as an apprentice at Mazagon Dockyard in Mumbai, he learned the ropes of engineering with grit and perseverance. Through sheer dedication, he went on to establish DAS Offshore Engineering Pvt. Ltd., a company that today plays a key role in India's offshore oil and gas infrastructure. Celebrated in the media as a "Dalit Millionaire," Khade's success is more than personal achievement—it is a symbol of breaking barriers, uplifting his community, and proving that determination can turn struggle into triumph.



### 19) Sant Niranjan Dass (SC)

Sant Niranjan Das, the spiritual head of Dera Sachkhand Ballan in Jalandhar, Punjab, has been a guiding force for the Ravidassia community. Belonging to the Dalit tradition, he rose to become the fifth Gaddi Nashin of the Dera, an institution that has long been a pillar of strength for the community, especially in the Doaba region. Under his leadership, the Dera played a historic role in 2010 by declaring the Ravidassia faith as a distinct religion, giving millions a renewed sense of identity and dignity. His journey has not been without hardship—he was among those injured in the 2009 attack on Dera leaders in Vienna—but his resilience only deepened his commitment to service. In 2026, his lifelong dedication to society, spirituality, and human welfare was recognized with the Padma Shri, honouring him as a leader who has uplifted his people and preserved their faith with courage and compassion.



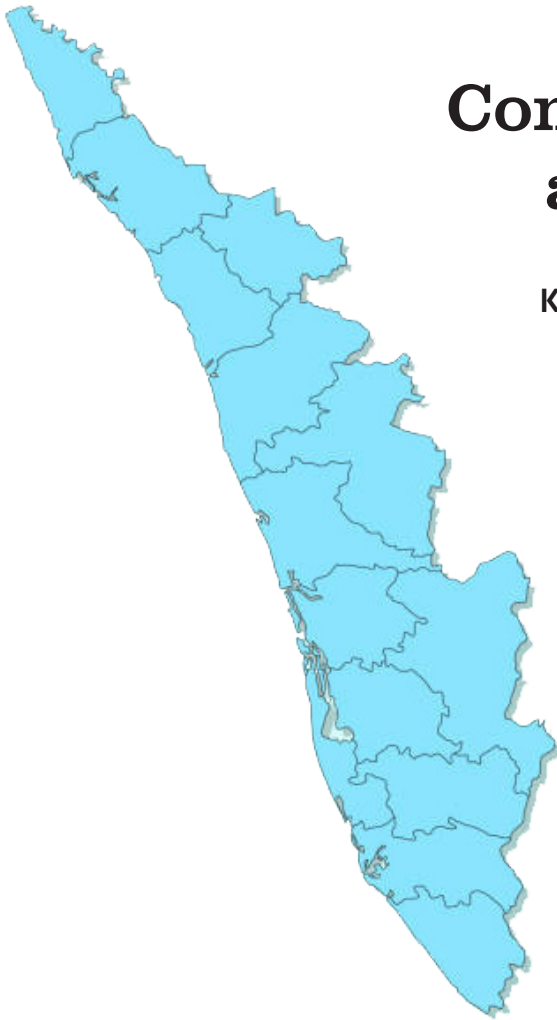
### 20) Shibu Sorren (ST)

Shibu Soren, fondly remembered as Dishom Guru, was a towering leader of the Santal tribal community and a driving force behind the creation of Jharkhand. Born on January 11, 1944, in Ramgarh district, he rose from humble beginnings to become a powerful voice for tribal rights, land protection, and social justice. As former Chief Minister of Jharkhand, his leadership embodied the aspirations of marginalized communities and gave shape to their long struggle for dignity and self-determination. In recognition of his lifelong service to society and his pivotal role in shaping Jharkhand's identity, he was conferred the Padma Bhushan in 2026, one of India's highest civilian honours.

*uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



# Deprived Communities in Kerala and the Road Ahead



Kerala, India’s model state, boasts top human development, near-universal literacy, and in 2025 declared extreme poverty eradicated via EPEP. Yet Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes still face deep socio-economic disparities, exclusion, and limited political voice. As 2026 elections are near, these inequities demand urgent action. Tat Tvam Asi—“Thou Art That”—calls every Keralite to recognise shared divinity, turning empathy into justice, dignity, and true inclusion for the marginalised.

Sumesh C V



Kerala is often celebrated as a model state in India, with its high human development indices, near-universal literacy, and robust healthcare system. In 2025, the state even claimed to have eradicate extreme poverty through its Extreme Poverty Eradication Programme (EPEP). Yet beneath this shining narrative lies a more complex reality: marginalized communities—Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)—continue to grapple with entrenched socio-economic challenges.

As Kerala approaches the 2026 Assembly elections, these disparities are not just social issues but political ones, shaping the voices and votes of millions. The dictum - Tat Tvam Asi—“Thou Art That”—reminds us of shared humanity, but for many Dalits and Adivasis in Kerala, dignity and equality remain elusive.

## Demographic and Social Status

- Scheduled Castes (SCs): Comprise about 10% of Kerala’s population, roughly 3.2

million people.


- Scheduled Tribes (STs): Around 2% of the population, approximately 650,000 people.
- Literacy Rates: Kerala’s average literacy is ~94%. SC literacy stands at ~ 82%, while ST literacy lags at ~59%.
- Employment: A large proportion of SC/ST households depend on daily wage labor, subsistence farming, or informal work, leaving them vulnerable to shocks like crop failures or market fluctuations.

Despite Kerala’s progressive policies, these communities remain disproportionately disadvantaged.

## Persistent Challenges

### 1. Poverty and Economic Vulnerability

Kerala’s poverty eradication narrative masks deep inequalities. In Wayanad’s tribal hamlets, surveys under EPEP revealed that one-third of the 64,006 targeted households had no steady income, and one-fifth faced



food insecurity. Activists point out that 90% of tribal families remain landless, living in plastic huts without electricity or clean water. SC households, though slightly better off, still face high unemployment rates and limited access to modern jobs in IT, tourism, or skilled industries.

## 2. Education and Healthcare Inequality

Education is Kerala's pride, but marginalized groups remain excluded:

- ST literacy (59%) trails far behind the state average.
- SC literacy (~82%) is better but still below Kerala's overall levels.
- Dropout rates among tribal children remain high due to distant schools, malnutrition, and stigma. Healthcare gaps are equally stark. Remote tribal areas in Idukki and Wayanad often lack doctors, and 25% of EPEP families reported chronic illnesses without insurance coverage. This cycle of poor education and health limits skill-building and perpetuates poverty.

## 3. Social Exclusion and Discrimination

Caste-based prejudice continues to erode self-esteem and isolate communities:

All communal groups within marginalized communities to tackle common challenges and achieve common goals. Constitutional and governmental safeguards exist, but their effectiveness depends on collective mobilization. The members of SCs, STs, and OBCs must recognize their strength, demand accountability, and fight for their rights and entitlements. The upcoming 2026 Assembly elections present an opportunity: if these communities unite, they can reshape Kerala's political landscape.

- Dalits and Adivasis face stigma in housing, employment, and social networks.
- HIV-affected or queer tribal families were only recently mapped under EPEP as "invisible poor," delaying aid.
- Intra-community tensions, such as Pulaya sub-group disputes over reservation shares, further fragment SC solidarity.

## 4. Infrastructure Deficiencies

Marginalized communities often live in segregated settlements with poor infrastructure:

- Lack of clean water, sanitation, and roads amplifies health risks.
- The SHELTER project in Malappuram found youth unemployment tied to remote, unconnected hamlets.
- Critics in 2025 noted that EPEP overlooked thousands of families surviving on just one meal a day.

## 5. Limited Political Power

Despite reserved seats, SC/ST voices remain muted in decision-making.

- SC vote fragmentation is evident: Paraya groups shifted allegiance to UDF/NDA after dissatisfaction with LDF's handling of EWS quotas.
- Forest Rights Act claims remain delayed, leaving tribal families without secure land.
- Electoral roll revisions in 2025 risked disenfranchising poor SC/ST women, raising concerns about democratic inclusion.

## Humanizing the Struggle

Behind every statistic lies a lived reality:

- A tribal child walking miles to reach a school, only to drop out due to hunger.
- A Dalit woman excluded from electoral rolls, silenced in the democratic process.
- Families in plastic huts, surviving on one meal a day, while Kerala celebrates poverty eradication.

These stories remind us that development is not just about numbers—it is about dignity, inclusion, and justice.

## The Future Ahead: Pathways for Change

### 1. Comprehensive Data Collection

Kerala must launch a state-wide volunteer nomination campaign to build a database on marginalized communities, capturing personal details, education levels, and financial status. This mirrors the 2025 EPEP model, which mapped 64,000 vulnerable households, enabling precise aid targeting.

### 2. Tailored Schemes

Skill training, land restitution, and micro-credit programs should be rolled out for SCs and STs. The SHELTER project in Malappuram offers a model, providing vocational programs for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) like the Cholanaicka.

### 3. Systematic Monitoring

Need to Introduce digital tracking and periodic audits to ensure schemes deliver outcomes. Post-2025 audits revealed gaps in tribal sustainability, prompting refinements like



ngoing health check-ins.

#### **4. Awareness and Rights Campaigns**

Need to Conduct community workshops, media outreach, and school programs to combat stigma. Koraga awareness drives boosted school retention by educating families on scholarships and anti-discrimination laws.

#### **5. Partnerships for Change**

Forge collaborations between government, NGOs, corporates, and local bodies.

NGO-government tie-ups in Idukki aided Forest Rights claims, while corporate CSR funded infrastructure in SC settlements.

#### **Towards Unity and Empowerment**

It is high time to unite all communal groups within marginalized communities to tackle common challenges and achieve common goals. Constitutional and governmental safeguards exist, but their effectiveness depends on collective mobilization.

The members of SCs, STs, and OBCs must recognize their strength, demand accountability, and fight for their rights and entitlements. The upcoming 2026 Assembly elections present an opportunity: if these communities unite, they can reshape Kerala's political landscape and ensure policies reflect their needs.

#### **Conclusion**

Kerala's marginalized communities stand at a crossroads. Yet, in this very moment lies immense hope and possibility. Despite persistent

economic vulnerability, social exclusion, and political underrepresentation—even amid progressive policies and constitutional safeguards—a brighter dawn awaits through bold, data-driven interventions, truly inclusive schemes, and the unstoppable power of collective mobilization.

More importantly, it calls upon every Keralite, every Indian, to awaken to the timeless spirit of Tat Tvam Asi— "Thou art That." This profound Upanishadic declaration reminds us that the divine essence shines equally in every soul; the struggles of the marginalized are our own struggles, their dignity, our shared dignity.

Rise with compassion! Let empathy dissolve barriers, solidarity ignite action, and unity fuel justice. When we see ourselves in the other, indifference transforms into unbreakable brotherhood. Kerala's legacy of harmony and humanity can lead the way—building a society where no one is left behind, where equity blooms, and shared prosperity becomes reality.

True progress is not distant; it begins today, with hearts united in the eternal truth: We are all one. Embrace it, live it, and watch transformation unfold.

*Author is a working professional in a leading MNC.  
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



# The Story of Sharmistha Sethi and Why We Must Change

In Odisha's Kendrapara district, a sad event shows how caste bias still hurts rural India. The Nuagaon anganwadi center has been closed for almost three months. This happened after Sharmistha Sethi, a young Dalit woman aged 20 to 23, got a job there as a helper and cook in November 2025. She is the first graduate in her poor Scheduled Caste family. The center had 20 children signed up, but upper-caste parents pulled them out. They said they do not want their kids to eat food cooked by a Dalit woman. Now, the children miss school, meals like sattv and eggs, and playtime. This boycott does not help the kids at all. It keeps them away from



basic learning and growth.

This case reminds us of a big UGC notice on caste bullying in colleges. The University Grants Commission made new rules in 2026 called Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions Regulations. These rules ask schools and universities to stop caste discrimination against SC, ST, OBC, and other groups. Colleges must set up cells to handle complaints fast and face punishment if they do not follow. But many people do not see how important this is. Caste fights in colleges have gone up a lot in recent years. They even led to sad events like student suicides. If we let this go on, Dalit students cannot grow and lead in the future. The village problem is like a small version of this. We need to wake up and act.

Sharmistha wanted to serve her village with her small job of Rs 5,000 a month. But upper-caste people warned her not to cook. They took away the children and even free food for pregnant mothers. Officials tried to talk to them many times, but the bias stays. People fear the SC/ST Atrocities Act, so they do not say it out loud. This is not right. It hurts a trained woman and innocent kids. In 2026, with AI and tech everywhere, we cannot let such old thinking block kids' future.

After more than 75 years of freedom, Dalits still face bias when they speak up. Upper-caste groups try to keep them quiet. Social justice means we must ask why this happens. Laws like the Atrocities Act protect rights, but they cannot change hearts alone. The government helps with jobs and seats, but people must accept Dalits too. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar fought hard for this. He wanted his caste to get respect, education, and a role in building the nation. But leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Nehru turned him away. Gandhi went on fasts to stop separate votes for Dalits. Nehru kept Dr Ambedkar out of key groups and helped others beat him in 1952 elections. They did not give him the credit he deserved. This shows change needs everyone, not just rules.

Now, the first group to get benefits from reservations is joining main jobs. You see them in private companies. But then the talk of "merit" starts again. I do not understand how caste matters in cooking or merit there. In cities, Zomato and Swiggy deliver food. The delivery boy drops it at your door. No one knows who cooked it or their caste. Village people who boycott Sharmistha forget this. They act like they live in old times. Today is the AI age. Machines, tech, and new ideas do not care about caste. Apps like Zomato make food reach everyone fast, no questions asked. Why cannot villagers see that their kids will grow up in this world?

Dr Ambedkar wanted acceptance for his people, their skills, and work for India. But he did not get that. Today villagers do the same by keeping kids from anganwadi. Laws help keep rights safe, but being human means we must welcome others. Let Sharmistha cook. Let tech break old walls. When kids grow and move to cities, they will eat food from all kinds without thinking twice. Villages must change too. Denying services to children hurts everyone. It is time to live Dr Ambedkar's idea: equal chance for all, with open hearts. Private jobs show reservations to help people join in. Now, we must end hate in villages for real fairness.

*Author is Pune based journalist.  
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



## Maharashtra Village Declares Itself 'Caste-Free'

The gram sabha of Saundala village in Ahilyanagar district, Maharashtra, has unanimously passed a resolution declaring the village "caste-free" to eliminate discrimination, untouchability and social injustice. The decision was taken at a gram panchayat meeting chaired by the sarpanch, affirming that no discrimination would be allowed on the basis of caste, religion, creed or lineage.

The resolution states that all public places and services, including temples, water sources, cremation grounds, schools and government facilities, will remain open to all residents without bias. Villagers also resolved not to post or promote content encouraging untouchability or social boycott, with action proposed for violations. Inspired by the ideals of social reformers such as Dr B R Ambedkar and Jyotirao Phule, the initiative has been forwarded to the state government. The village had earlier passed resolutions against discriminatory customs and abusive language, imposing fines in certain cases.



## Not Every Insult to SC/ST Member Is Atrocity: Calcutta HC Quashes Case

The Calcutta High Court has ruled that workplace or professional disputes cannot automatically attract provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act unless there is clear caste-based insult or intimidation in public view. Quashing criminal proceedings against a Sanskrit professor, the court held that not every intentional insult to a Scheduled Caste member amounts to an offence under Section 3(1)(r) of the Act.

The case arose from a complaint by an Assistant Professor who alleged harassment and humiliation by the department head. The court found the allegations related to administrative and professional disagreements and lacked specific claims of caste-based abuse in public view. Citing Supreme Court precedents, it said the essential ingredients

of the offence were not made out and that continuing the prosecution would amount to misuse of criminal law.

## Madras HC Seeks State Reply on GO to Remove Caste Names in Public Spaces

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court has sought the Tamil Nadu government's response on its October 6, 2025 government order laying down guidelines to identify and remove caste-based names in public spaces. The court asked whether a similar 1978 order had been implemented and what necessitated a fresh directive.

The bench noted that caste names continue to be used in public places, including government buildings, despite the earlier order. While observing that courts generally do not interfere in policy matters, the judges said intervention would be warranted if mala fide intent or misuse of power is established.

The state submitted that the 1978 order dealt only with street names, whereas the new order has a broader scope. It clarified that only derogatory caste names would be considered for change after public consultation and that the timelines in the GO are directory. The matter has been adjourned to February 23.

## New UGC guidelines to address caste-based discrimination will not be misused, assures Centre

The Government has assured that the new University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines are to address caste-based discrimination on campuses, and it will not be misused. Talking to the media, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan today said that it is the responsibility of the Centre, State governments and UGC to ensure no misuse of the law in the name of discrimination. The Minister said that the matter is under the supervision of the Supreme Court and all actions will be carried out within the ambit of the Constitution.

Earlier, in a regulation issued on the 13th of January, 2026, the UGC stated that higher education institutions are required to set up Equal Opportunity Centres, Equity Committees, grievance redressal systems, and round-the-clock helplines to address caste-based or any form of discrimination. According to the Government, these measures aim to create safer, more inclusive learning environments for all students and to strengthen the anti-discrimination framework.

*Compiled by Prajvalant.  
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*

# DIN VISHESH



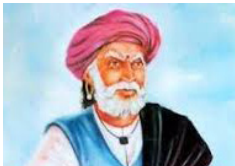
## Remembering Sant Tukaram

**5th March**

**Sant Tukaram Birth Anniversary**

Sant Tukaram (1608–1649), a 17th-century sant-poet from Maharashtra, was one of the most influential figures of the Bhakti movement. His work was deeply rooted in devotion to Lord Vithoba (Vitthal) and in social reform, particularly against caste hierarchies and untouchability. Tukaram openly criticized the rigid varna system and untouchability.

Sant Tukaram's abhangas (devotional verses) rejected the idea that spiritual worth depended on birth or caste. He emphasized that true devotion and moral conduct mattered more than ritual purity. He taught that anyone, regardless of caste or social status, could attain God through sincere devotion. His work remains central to the Varkari tradition, which continues to emphasize equality, collective pilgrimage, and devotion beyond caste barriers.



**17th February**  
Lahuji Salve  
Death Anniversary



**19th February**  
Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj  
Birth Anniversary



**23rd February**  
Sant Gadgebaba  
Birth Anniversary



**26th February**  
V.D. Savarkar  
Death Anniversary



**10th March**  
Savitribai Phule  
Death Anniversary



**11th March**  
Sant Harichand Thakur  
Birth Anniversary



**11th March**  
Sayajirao Gaekwad III  
Birth Anniversary

To subscribe us,  
simply scan or click  
on this QR code and  
fill the form.

