

CASTE IN PRISON: A REALITY CHECK

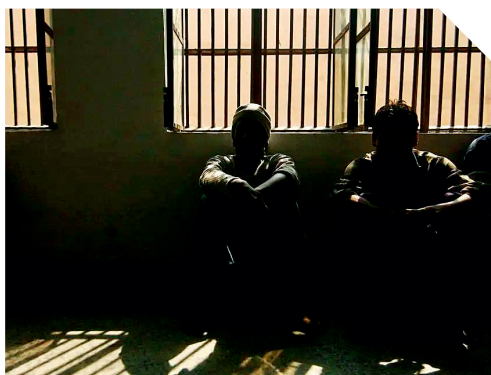


Bail Reform • Speedy Trials • Equality in Justice

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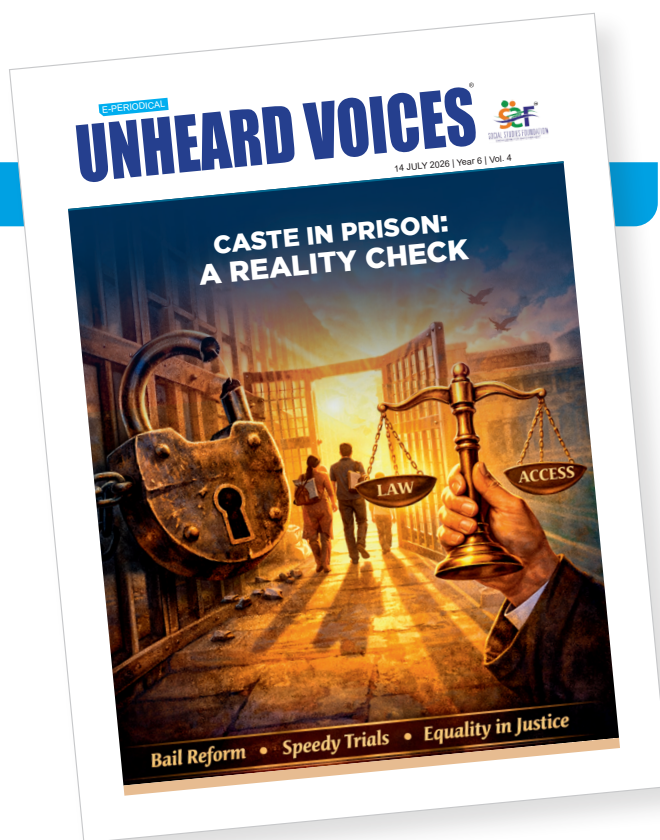
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EDITORIAL

SC Then, BC Now: A New Constitutional Interpretation ?

The recent judgment of the Madras High Court in the case of a Muslim petitioner has done much more than decide an individual dispute. It has opened an entirely new constitutional and social debate on the relationship between reservation and religious conversion. While previous landmark judgments have consistently held that a person who voluntarily converts to Islam or Christianity cannot continue to claim reservation meant for Scheduled Castes, this case presents a different and potentially far more significant question. It concerns reservation extended to Backward Class Muslims— a category that, in practical terms, falls within the Other Backward Classes (OBC) framework followed across much of the country. That distinction makes the judgment noteworthy.

The petitioner had sought the benefit of reservation under the Backward Class Muslim category after conversion. The High Court declined the claim, compelling the State Government to challenge the ruling. While the appeal will determine the immediate legal outcome, the judgment has already raised a constitutional issue whose implications extend far beyond Tamil Nadu.

For decades, Indian courts have repeatedly upheld one underlying principle: reservation is not merely a poverty alleviation measure but a constitutional remedy designed to address specific forms of historical and social disadvantage. This is particularly evident in the case of Scheduled Castes. With the same logic affected social groups from Hindu, Sikh and Buddha were included in the list of SC. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950,

as subsequently amended, confines Scheduled Caste status to specified religious communities because the disabilities sought to be remedied arose from the practice of untouchability within that social framework. Consequently, courts have consistently ruled that voluntary conversion to Islam or Christianity severs the legal basis for claiming Scheduled Caste reservation, even though social discrimination may continue in different forms.

This principle has been reaffirmed in a long line of judicial pronouncements. The courts have consistently maintained that reservation cannot travel independently of the constitutional conditions under which it was originally granted. Conversion changes the legal foundation on which the benefit rests. The Madras High Court judgment now extends the constitutional conversation into a comparatively unexplored area. Unlike Scheduled Castes, the OBC framework is based primarily on social and educational backwardness rather than untouchability. But the Court's reasoning raises an important question: if a person voluntarily changes his or her religious identity, should reservation benefits automatically continue without examining whether the constitutional basis for backwardness remains unchanged? That question deserves careful examination rather than ideological sloganeering.

Tamil Nadu has a unique reservation structure, including a separate category for Backward Class Muslims. Similar arrangements, in varying forms, exist elsewhere for several Muslim and Christian communities recognised as socially and educationally backward. Consequently, the

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Editor : Vijendra Sonawane

Advisory Editorial Board : Dr Sanjeevarayappa, Sapna Deepak, Dr Divya P. Velayudhan, Dr Aditi Narayani Paswan, Dr Neha Singh, Dr. Prakash Raj, Dr. Naresh M Chauhan

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implications of this litigation extend beyond one State. A number of communities across India currently receive reservation benefits under different backward class classifications despite belonging to religions that reject caste in doctrine. Whether these classifications fully satisfy constitutional principles is now likely to receive closer judicial scrutiny. Consequently, legislative and judiciary may now be required to demonstrate that such classifications satisfy the constitutional tests of identifiable backwardness, adequate data, and rational classification rather than merely continuing historical administrative practices. That distinction is important because reservation is an exception to the general principle of equality under the constitution. Like every constitutional exception, it must withstand continuous judicial examination. Policies cannot become immune from scrutiny simply because they have existed for decades.

The significance of the Madras High Court ruling therefore lies not merely in its immediate legal consequences but in the constitutional questions it has revived. Can reservation continue solely because a community has historically received it? Does religious conversion alter the constitutional basis on which backwardness was originally recognised? Should Parliament or State Legislatures revisit existing classifications in the light of contemporary social realities? These are no longer academic questions. They are now active constitutional issues. The Tamil Nadu Government's decision to challenge the verdict ensures that higher courts will eventually provide

greater clarity. Whatever the final outcome, the litigation is likely to become an important milestone in reservation jurisprudence.

The debate should not be reduced to partisan politics. Reservation remains one of the most sensitive and consequential instruments of social justice in India. Any expansion—or continuation—of reservation categories must satisfy constitutional discipline. The Madras High Court has, perhaps unintentionally, opened the floodgates for a wider national discussion. Parliament, constitutional experts, sociologists, and policymakers would do well to engage with the issues before fresh litigation across different States forces piecemeal judicial intervention.

The Madras High Court has done more than decide an individual case. It has reopened a constitutional debate that can no longer be ignored. For decades, the judiciary has consistently held that voluntary conversion to Islam or Christianity brings an end to reservation benefits where the constitutional basis for such reservation no longer survives. The present case raises the question whether the same principle should also govern reservation extended to converted Backward Class communities. If the original intention of constitutional justification disappears after voluntary conversion, its continuation demands the closest judicial scrutiny. Parliament, governments and constitutional experts must now address this issue with clarity. The principle that has guided Indian courts for decades should remain the guiding light: no reservation after voluntary religious conversion.

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Judiciary Asserts Again: No Reservation After Conversion

A series of judicial decisions have unequivocally asserted that extending Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) reservation and related statutory protection to those, who have converted to Christianity or Islam is unconstitutional. A recent judgement by Madras High Court has once again highlighted this point. Madras High Court announced the Tamil Nadu government decision to grant reservation to converted Muslims as unconstitutional.



Satyajit



The concerned ruling came in a case, filed by one Sameer Ahmed, who had converted to Islam in 2015. He had sought reservation under the category of backward class Muslim. The High Court held that a Hindu who converts to Islam becomes "just a Mussalman," and that his or her status within the Muslim community is not determined by the caste to which the individual previously belonged those who have voluntarily converted to Christianity or Islam are unconstitutional.

A Division Bench comprising Justices G.R. Swaminathan and P.B. Balaji held that the

Government Order was inconsistent with the constitutional framework and consequently struck it down. "As a corollary, we hold that a convert to Islam cannot claim the status of Backward Class Muslim. He is only a Muslim and that's all there is to it," the Court said.

Before the High Court, the petitioner relied on the Government Order dated March 9, 2024, which provided that individuals belonging to reserved categories, who converted to Islam could be issued community certificates classifying them under one of the seven notified Backward Class Muslim communities in the



State. The State government defended the Government Order, contending that it had been issued pursuant to the recommendations of the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission. It further argued that the policy merely ensured the continuity of reservation benefits for individuals who had already been entitled to such benefits prior to their conversion to Islam.

The Division Bench, however, rejected the State's submissions and declined to uphold the validity of the Government Order. In its judgment, the Division Bench observed that the legal position on the issue had been settled as early as 1951 in *G. Michael v. S. Venkateswaran*.

The Court strongly observed that the executive could not override binding judicial precedents through a government order, stating that such an exercise would undermine the rule of law. It further found the Government Order to be arbitrary, as it indiscriminately classified converts from different reserved communities under the single category of Backward Class Muslims.

Judicial Stamp

Judicial decisions have consistently recognised this constitutional distinction. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that conversion to Christianity or Islam ordinarily results in the loss of Scheduled Caste status under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950. The Court has also recognised that Scheduled Caste status may revive only upon genuine reconversion and acceptance into the original community in accordance with established legal principles. These judgments reinforce the constitutional understanding that Scheduled Caste status is not merely a matter of birth but of the legal framework established under Article 341.

Possible Problem

There is another important public policy consideration. If constitutional benefits meant for Scheduled Castes continue unchanged even after conversion, the legal distinction between religious identities becomes substantially blurred. The State would, in effect, be signalling that conversion carries no consequence for eligibility under a constitutional classification specifically tied to a defined historical context. Such a policy could create incentives that Parliament never contemplated while framing the constitutional scheme.

This concern should not be misunderstood as an argument against freedom of religion. Every citizen enjoys the fundamental right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to constitutional limitations. Individuals remain entirely free to embrace any faith of their choice.

The constitutional issue is different: whether a voluntary change of religious identity should leave untouched every constitutional benefit that was created for a historically defined social category. These are distinct questions.

Public policy must also consider the interests of the existing Scheduled Caste communities. Large sections of these communities continue to struggle with educational deprivation, limited access to higher education, inadequate representation in public employment, and persistent social discrimination. Their claim on reservation is direct because it arises from the constitutional framework itself. Diluting that entitlement by expanding the beneficiary pool without constitutional amendment risks undermining the very purpose of affirmative action.

Ultimately, reservation is an instrument of justice, not a universal welfare entitlement. Its legitimacy depends upon maintaining a clear relationship between the constitutional disability it seeks to remedy and the beneficiaries it identifies. Once that connection is weakened, affirmative action risks losing both its moral force and its constitutional coherence.

Reservation is not a poverty eradication scheme

One of the strongest constitutional arguments is that Scheduled Caste reservation was never intended to address poverty alone. If poverty were the criterion, millions of poor people from every community would qualify. The rationale was specific: historical untouchability and social exclusion arising from the caste system. If reservation is linked to caste-based disabilities, then how can a person who has formally left the religious and social framework associated with those disabilities continue to claim the same constitutional remedy?

Presidential Order is not accidental

Many people discuss the issue as though Christians and Muslims were unfairly excluded. The counterpoint is that the Constitution's framers and subsequent governments consciously retained this distinction for more than seven decades. If the exclusion was obviously unconstitutional, it would not have survived repeated judicial scrutiny and parliamentary review. This demonstrates that the distinction has a constitutional rationale, not merely a political one.

Conversion cannot be consequence-free

Every major life decision carries consequences. Changing citizenship has consequences. Changing domicile has consequences. Marriage has consequences. Adoption has consequences.



MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT **STRIKES DOWN** TAMIL NADU GOVERNMENT ORDER GRANTING BC-MUSLIM RESERVATION TO CONVERTS TO ISLAM.

Similarly, conversion changes one's legal and religious identity. Freedom of religion includes the freedom to convert, but it does not include the right to retain every legal benefit attached to the previous religious identity. A person who embraces another faith is exercising a constitutional right. However, constitutional rights cannot become a one-way street. The question becomes: Can one reject the social identity associated with a community and yet indefinitely retain all the benefits attached to that identity?

Double Benefit

Converted people can access: minority welfare schemes, minority educational institutions, OBC reservation where applicable, general welfare schemes available to all citizens. The question is: Why should one section receive minority-linked benefits and simultaneously seek Scheduled Caste benefits meant for another constitutionally defined category?

Impact on existing SC/ST communities

Reservation means addition to the number of claimants and every addition means fewer seats, more competition and greater dilution of benefits. A Dalit student competing for a medical seat or government job is directly affected. Social justice cannot be achieved by redistributing opportunities away from one disadvantaged group to another without clear constitutional justification. What new evidence has emerged that justifies overturning seventy-five years of constitutional practice? Has it been conclusively demonstrated that Christian and Muslim converts suffer the same form of untouchability that Article 341 was designed to address?

Ambedkarite perspective

Reservation was conceived as a remedy for specific historical disabilities. Dr Ambedkar consistently emphasized constitutional safeguards for communities subjected to untouchability. Expanding benefits without preserving their original purpose risks weakening the very instrument Ambedkar designed for the upliftment of the most disadvantaged sections. A converted Christian or Muslim may face poverty, discrimination, or social disadvantage. The constitutional question is different. The issue is not whether hardship exists. The issue is whether that hardship falls within the constitutional category for which Scheduled Caste reservation was created.

1. Soosai v. Union of India (1985)

Facts

- The petitioner belonged to the Adi Dravida Scheduled Caste.
- He converted to Christianity.
- He challenged Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.

Held

- The Supreme Court refused to strike down the Presidential Order.
- It held that there was insufficient material before the Court to conclude that Dalit Christians continued to suffer the same constitutional disability warranting SC reservation.
- Therefore, SC reservation remained unavailable after conversion to Christianity.

Importance

- This remains one of the foundational judgments on the issue.

2. C.M. Arumugam v. S. Rajgopal (1976)

Facts

- Issue arose in an election dispute.
- Court examined whether conversion affected Scheduled Caste identity.

Held

- Conversion to Christianity generally terminates SC status.
- However, if the person genuinely reconverted to Hinduism and is accepted back by the caste, SC status can revive.

Importance

- Introduced the doctrine of restoration after genuine reversion.

3. K.P. Manu v. Chairman, Scrutiny Committee (2015)

Facts

- Individual born SC converted through family history but later reconverted.

Held

- Supreme Court ruled that restoration of SC status is possible only if:
 1. reversion is genuine,
 2. original caste accepts him back,
 3. evidence supports both.

Importance

- Reaffirmed that mere birth is insufficient; present legal and social status matters.

4. C. Selvarani v. Special Secretary-cum-District Collector (2024)

Facts

- Woman claimed an SC certificate for employment.
- Evidence showed she continued practising Christianity.

Held

- The Supreme Court rejected her claim.
- It observed that a person cannot simultaneously practise Christianity and claim to be Hindu only for reservation.
- The Court described such conduct as contrary to the constitutional scheme and amounting to a fraud on the reservation system.

Importance

- Strengthened the principle that religious profession determines eligibility under the Presidential Order.

5. Chinthada Anand v. State of Andhra Pradesh (2026)

Facts

- Appellant belonged to the Madiga Scheduled Caste.
- He converted to Christianity and became a pastor.

- He later sought protection under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act after alleging caste-based abuse.

Held

- The Supreme Court dismissed his claim.
- It held.
- conversion to Christianity results in immediate loss of Scheduled Caste status under Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950;
- Consequently, no constitutional reservation or statutory protection dependent on SC status—including under the SC/ST Act—can be claimed unless there is a genuine reversion satisfying the legal requirements.

Importance

- This is presently the strongest and most comprehensive Supreme Court pronouncement on the issue.

Important High Court decisions

Allahabad High Court (Jitendra Sahani case, 2024)

The Court observed that once a Scheduled Caste person converts to Christianity, he ceases to be entitled to SC benefits under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950. It directed the Uttar Pradesh Government to identify such cases and discontinue the grant of SC benefits to converted Christians.

Madras High Court – S. Yasmine

The Court held that a person cannot automatically carry the caste of birth after conversion. Whether reservation survives conversion is governed by the constitutional framework and Supreme Court precedents, not by birth alone.

Madras High Court – G. Michael

The Court ruled that a Hindu who converts to Islam ceases to belong to the caste into which he was born for purposes of reservation under the constitutional scheme.

Constitutional basis

All these decisions rely principally on Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, issued under Article 341 of the Constitution, which provides that no person professing a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste. Sikhism was included by amendment in 1956 and Buddhism in 1990.

*Author is a Senior Journalist from Pune.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Caste In Prison: A Reality Check

A trend analysis of conviction and undertrial patterns, caste disparities, and their sociological roots, based on National Crime Records Bureau Prison Statistics India 2024. India's prisons closed 2024 holding 5,11,542 inmates against a sanctioned capacity of 4,53,769, an occupancy rate of 112.7%. That figure sounds almost routine after years of far worse overcrowding, but it conceals a more troubling story underneath: India is not filling its jails with convicted criminals. It is filling them with people awaiting trial, and disproportionately, with people from its most marginalised caste and class backgrounds.

Tanishka



The National Crime Records Bureau's Prison Statistics India (PSI) 2024 report, read across a five-year window from 2019 to 2024, shows a criminal justice system where custody has drifted further from conviction, and where the burden of that drift falls unevenly.

The Overcrowding Curve: Capacity Catches, Composition Does not

Between 2019 and 2024, the total prison population rose by 6.3%, from 4,81,387 to 5,11,542 inmates, peaking in 2022 at 5,73,220 before easing over the following two years.

Prison capacity, meanwhile, expanded faster, up 13.2%, from 4,00,934 to 4,53,769, pulling the national occupancy rate down from a high of 131.4% in 2022 to a decade-low of 112.7% in 2024. On paper, this looks like progress. But occupancy is a ratio, and a falling ratio can mask a static or worsening underlying problem if both numerator and denominator move together. That is roughly what happened here: capacity building, not a fall in unnecessary incarceration, did most of the work.

The relief is also unevenly distributed.

Delhi ended 2024 with an occupancy rate of 194.6%, nearly double its sanctioned capacity, followed by Meghalaya (163.5%), Jammu & Kashmir (148.3%), Madhya Pradesh (147.1%) and Maharashtra (143.9%). At the other end, Lakshadweep (7.8%), Ladakh (32.9%) and Manipur (38.8%) run well under capacity. A national average of 112.7% therefore describes no actual state; it is an artefact of averaging acute urban crises against near-empty small-UT jails.

Highest occupancy (2024)	Rate (%)	Lowest occupancy (2024)	Rate (%)
Delhi	194.6	Lakshadweep	7.8
Meghalaya	163.5	Ladakh	32.9
Jammu & Kashmir	148.3	Manipur	38.8
Madhya Pradesh	147.1	Nagaland	40.5
Maharashtra	143.9	DNH & Daman Diu	63.3

Source: NCRB Prison Statistics India 2024, Table on State/UT-wise Occupancy Rate

Convicts Fall, Undertrials Rise: The Core Trend

The most consequential shift in the five-year data is compositional. Undertrial inmates—people held in custody while their trial is still pending, legally presumed innocent, rose by 11.6% between 2019 and 2024, from 3,32,916 to 3,71,440, after peaking at 4,34,302 in 2022. Convicts, people who have actually been found guilty and sentenced, fell by 5.8% over the same period, from 1,44,567 to 1,36,138. Detenues fell 5.4%, while the small residual and other inmates category rose 34.5%, from 681 to 916, a sharp percentage jump, though on a small base.

Undertrials now make up roughly 73% of India's total prison population, dwarfing the convict share, which has slid toward roughly a quarter of inmates. This is the structural core of Indian incarceration:

prison functions less as a place where the convicted serve sentences and more as a holding system for the unconvinced. When the release data for 2024 is added, the picture sharpens further. Of the 15,93,234 undertrials released that year, 95.1% (15,14,614) were released simply on bail, not acquitted, not vindicated, just granted conditional liberty they arguably should have had from the outset. Only 2.8% were acquitted by courts and 1.0% were released on appeal.

Mode of release (undertrials, 2024)	Number	Share
Released on bail	15,14,614	95.1%
Acquitted by courts	44,239	2.8%
Released on appeal	16,059	1.0%
Transferred to other states	4,310	0.3%
Other / extradited	14,012	0.9%

Source: NCRB Prison Statistics India 2024, Chart 7.2- Shares of Different Types of Releases of Undertrial Prisoners, 2024.

Read together, the trend lines tell a simple story: the system is arresting and detaining at a pace conviction cannot match, then eventually correcting itself through bail rather than through the speed of trial. Parole data reinforces this, of 20,627 people released on parole in 2024, only 323 (1.5%) absconded, undercutting the standard justification for cautious, restrictive bail practices.

The SC/ST Dimension

The PSI 2024 reports caste breakdown, available for 82% of undertrials nationally (states including Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh did not furnish caste data), shows that Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes together accounted for 67.3% of undertrial prisoners in the states that did report. SC and ST prisoners alone made up 31.3%

Category	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	5-yr change
Total inmates	4,81,387	4,88,511	5,54,034	5,73,220	5,30,333	5,11,542	+6.3%
Undertrials	3,32,916	3,71,848	4,27,165	4,34,302	3,89,910	3,71,440	+11.6%
Convicts	1,44,567	1,12,589	1,22,852	1,33,415	1,35,536	1,36,138	-5.8%
Detenues	3,223	3,590	3,470	4,324	3,916	3,048	-5.4%
Occupancy rate (%)	120.1	118.0	130.2	131.4	120.8	112.7	-6.2 pts

Source: NCRB Prison Statistics India 2024, Chart 2.12- Trend in Number of Different Types of Prison Inmates, 2019–2024.



of undertrials in 2024, nearly a third of all people held pending trial, against a combined SC+ST share of roughly a fifth of India's population. The OBC industrial share has climbed steadily, from 29% in 2001 to 36% in 2024, even as the combined SC+ST share has eased slightly from 39.2% in 2001, suggesting the burden has broadened across marginalised groups rather than concentrated or dispersed.

Religious minorities show a parallel pattern: Muslim prisoners made up 18.8% of undertrials, well above their roughly 14% share of the national population, with Sikh (4.8%) and Christian (2.4%) prisoners also represented. Nearly two in three undertrials had not studied beyond grade X, and close to half were under 30, a population profile of young, poorly educated, and disproportionately lower-caste or minority men, cycling through pre-trial detention that the bail-heavy release data suggests was frequently unnecessary in the first place.

This is not new. Caste disparity in Indian prisons has been documented in NCRB data for over two decades, and the direction of change is modest at best: the SC/ST industrial share has fallen by less than eight percentage points

in over twenty years, while the OBC share has actually grown. Six years of PSI data, 2019 through 2024, do not show a system correcting itself so much as a system holding a stable, disproportionate caste composition steady while its overall size fluctuates with policy and pandemic hocks.

A Sociological Reading

These numbers are not simply administrative; they describe a social mechanism, and Indian sociology offers several vocabularies for naming it. B.R. Ambedkar's account of graded inequality is the most direct fit: caste in India is not a binary of privilege and deprivation but a hierarchy in which different groups are ranked relative to one another, and access to institutions, including courts, bail, and legal defence tracks. An industrial population that is disproportionately SC, ST and OBC is, in Ambedkar's terms, evidence that formal legal equality has not dissolved the graded social order; it has simply relocated inside a new institution, the prison.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital sharpens the mechanism. Bail, in principle, is a neutral legal instrument. In practice, securing it requires economic capital (surety amounts, lawyers'



fees), cultural capital (literacy, familiarity with court procedure, confidence navigating bureaucracy) and social capital (contacts who can vouch, stand surety, or expedite a hearing). Marginalised caste groups are systematically poorer in all three forms of capital, not by accident but by the accumulated effect of historical exclusion from land, education and administrative networks. The result is what Bourdieu would call symbolic violence performed through a formally neutral system: the law does not explicitly discriminate, yet its practical operation reproduces existing inequality, because the resources needed to benefit from procedure are themselves unequally distributed.

Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict-theory lens adds an institutional dimension. Prisons, police and courts are authority structures, and Dahrendorf's insight is that conflict in modern societies is rooted less in property ownership than in unequal access to authority itself, who gets to make and enforce binding decisions over others. Over-policing of marginalised communities, documented separately in NCRB crime data and survey research on police attitudes, is an exercise of that authority differential: it does not simply reflect existing crime patterns but actively produces the undertrial population being discussed here. In this reading, the high undertrial share is not a neutral by-product of a slow judiciary; it is one visible output of an authority structure whose gatekeepers, police at the point of arrest, are unevenly distributed against particular social groups before a single court date is ever set. The Way Forward: What the Data Points Toward The trend data itself suggests where interventions would have the most leverage, since the bottleneck is visibly pre-trial rather than post-conviction. Four directions stand out.

First, bail reform and its actual implementation. The finding that 95.1% of undertrial releases in 2024 happened through bail, combined with a parole abscondence rate of just 1.5%, undercuts the caution that keeps bail restrictive in practice. The Supreme Courts own directions in *Satender Kumar Antil v. CBI* (2022), which called for categorising offences to guide bail decisions and reducing unnecessary arrests, point at exactly this gap between law and practice; the data suggests implementation, not fresh legislation, is the missing piece.

Second, legal aid that matches the population actually in custody. With most undertrials young, poorly educated and drawn disproportionately from SC, ST and OBC

communities, the operative barrier to bail is frequently procedural literacy and the cost of legal representation, not the merits of a case. Strengthening District Legal Services Authorities, expanding para-legal volunteer coverage inside jails, and tracking legal-aid uptake by caste category would let the next PSI report show whether aid is reaching the population it is meant to.

Third, faster case disposal through the mechanisms already on paper — fast-track courts, undertrial review committees mandated under the Model Prison Manual, and video-conferencing for routine hearings. Nearly 30,000 undertrials had already spent over three years in custody by the end of 2024; periodic, functioning review committees are the existing tool best placed to flag and release such cases without new law.

Fourth, caste-disaggregated data as a standing requirement, not an optional field. Six states, including Maharashtra and Delhi, did not report caste data for undertrials in 2024, which means any national caste figure is necessarily a partial picture. Making this reporting mandatory and standardised would let policymakers, courts and researchers actually monitor whether the SC/ST/OBC share of undertrials is falling in response to reform, rather than relying on estimates built from incomplete state-level submissions.

The five-year trend in NCRB's Prison Statistics India data resists a simple story of improvement or decline. Overcrowding has eased on paper, largely through capacity expansion rather than reduced detention. Undertrials continue to outnumber convicts by a wide and growing margin, and the release data suggests much of this detention resolves through bail rather than trial outcomes, implying a considerable share may have been avoidable. Layered onto this is a persistent, only marginally shifting caste disparity, in which Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are held in numbers well beyond their population share. Read sociologically, through Ambedkar's graded inequality, Bourdieu's unequal capital, and Dahrendorf's authority conflict, Indian prisons in 2024 look less like a self-contained criminal justice outcome and more like a mirror held up to the social order outside them, one in which who gets arrested, who can make bail, and who waits years for trial is still substantially a function of caste and class.

*Author is a postgraduate in Sociology from
Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



SC/ST ACT

This article examines the justice deficit in Scheduled Caste atrocity cases post 2015, analyzing NCRB data to assess the impact of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act. It highlights rising crime registration yet persistent gaps in prosecution and conviction, underscoring the disconnect between legislative intent and judicial reality.

Atrocities Act: Gap Between Legislative Intent & Judicial Reality

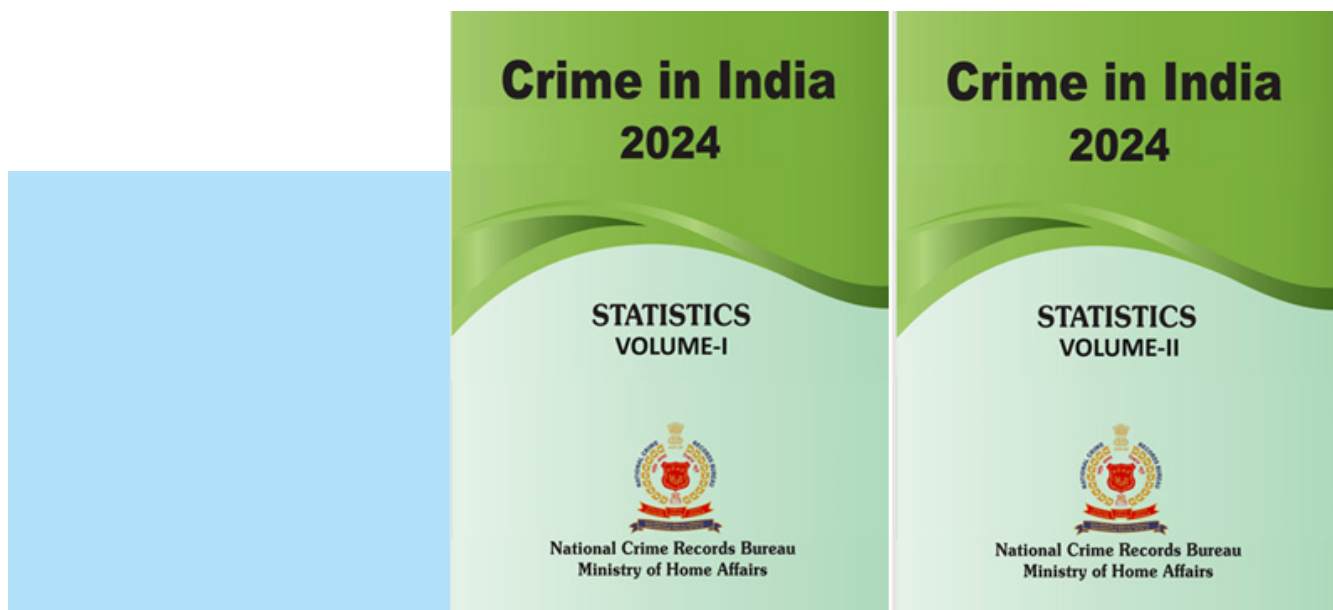
Priyance Gautam



The study aims to examine the crime-justice gap in atrocity cases against scheduled castes in India through a comprehensive evaluation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015. By analysing the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, the study tracks trends across the criminal justice continuum, spanning from crime registration and investigation to prosecution, and conviction rates. It undertakes a comparative assessment of pre and post amendment periods to determine whether the 2015 legislative revisions have improved the justice delivery mechanism for scheduled castes by mitigating case attrition.

The post- amendment period witnesses a significant surge in registration and

reporting rates. However, the upward trend is not only indicative of higher crime levels but also signifies better accessibility to legal remedies, registration procedure, legal awareness, mobilisation and socio-economic empowerment among the victims. Despite this, a striking incongruity remains between the legislative intent and practical justice delivery. The article argues that legal measures remain insufficient unless accompanied by a broader transformation in social hierarchies and economic power dynamics to bridge disparities in justice outcomes. Ultimately, this study shall provide policy relevant insights and recommendations to improve the enforcement of anti-atrocity legislation in India.



INTRODUCTION

Caste-based discrimination continues to persist as a significant challenge for scheduled caste (SCs) communities. It is deeply entrenched within the historical structure of caste-based social stratification. These marginalized communities are often subjected to untouchability, systemic discrimination, humiliation, social exclusion, exploitation, and various forms of violence¹. Such practices directly infringe upon the foundational human rights values and constitutional vision of substantive equality, dignity, and social justice.

According to 2011 Census of India, the Scheduled Castes accounts for 16.6% of the country's total population. The Constitution of India entails various provisions and affirmative action policies designed to protect members of the SCs communities, ensuring their equitable participation in nation-building. Recognising the systemic prejudice for over 3,000 years of institutionalised caste oppression faced by these marginalised caste communities, the Parliament passed the Scheduled Castes and the scheduled tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

The legislation marked a cornerstone in preventing commission of atrocities and safeguarding rights of historically oppressed castes. It delineated certain offences targeted at SCs and STs, classified them as atrocity offences while prescribing stringent punitive measures against the offenders.

The special anti-atrocity legislation was fundamentally distinct from the ordinary criminal law by incorporating a legal framework aimed at strengthening protections for marginalized

castes. The SCs and STs act, beyond its statutory mechanics, has contributed to the symbolic and social recognition that caste discrimination is a serious infringement of human dignity as well as constitutional values.

Notwithstanding several decades of implementation, the POA act 1989 faced significant enforcement challenges at multiple levels. These include procedural barriers to registration and investigation of cases, weak prosecution, prolonged judicial processes, low conviction outcomes. These institutional failures further compounded by underreporting of offences, witness intimidation, inadequate protection mechanisms, and the continued prevalence of caste- based social exclusion. Consequently, victims often experience dual victimization, first the initial caste- based atrocity and subsequently, through systemic failure within the criminal justice system. Collectively, these challenges have undermined the effectiveness of the act. So, without rigorous enforcement, its objectives cannot be fully realized, and thereby limiting its transformative potential.

Consequently, a significant gap has emerged between registration of offences, conviction outcomes and the effective delivery of justice. In response to these loopholes, the act was comprehensively amended in 2015, followed by subsequent modifications to expand the scope of legislation and improve institutional accountability throughout the legal framework. It is evident that caste discrimination transformed its manifestations along with the evolving dynamics of caste-based atrocities. Therefore, The SC/ST (POA)

Crime in India 2024

STATISTICS
VOLUME-III



National Crime Records Bureau
Ministry of Home Affairs

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Amendment 2015, which became effective from January 6, 2016, inserted new categories of offences as “atrocities”. these include actions such as garlanding with chappals, forcing manual scavenging, acts of public humiliation and degradation, caste-based verbal abuse, social and legislative exclusion in India. economic exclusion, obstructing the access of community resources, irrigation or forest rights, or restriction on political participation and any offences against scheduled caste women as devadasis, or perpetuating witchcraft-related atrocities.

By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of contemporary caste discrimination, the amendment expanded the legal safeguards for the Scheduled Caste community, reinforcing the constitutional commitment to uphold social justice, equality and human dignity.

To address the procedural delays, the amendment mandated the designation of exclusive courts and special prosecutors to expedite adjudication of cases. The act extended the protection of victims and witnesses during investigations. It introduced provisions on the responsibility and accountability of public officials by prescribing penalties in cases of wilful negligence. Furthermore, the 2015 POA legislative amendment ensured broader protection for members of Scheduled caste, making it more responsive to the everyday realities of caste discrimination.

But apart from its legislative advancement, the key issue remains regarding the actual impact on the final justice outcomes. By utilizing the official statistics of NCRB for post-amendment years reveals a substantial increase

in patterns of registration and reporting of crimes against SCs in India. This rising trend in the number of atrocity incidents suggests the increase in awareness and accessibility of legal remedies, willingness among victims to report instances of caste-based violence, and also the inclusion of previously unaddressed categories of offences, which enhanced the scope of legal protection through the 2015 amendment. However, despite improvements in the initial case reporting, persistent concerns continue to undermine its effectiveness. These include the low prosecution and conviction rate despite high charge-sheeting, backlog and slow resolution of atrocity cases, uneven implementation of the act across states due to insufficient resources, monitoring mechanisms, and victim assistance services.

Ultimately, these substantial gaps between the reported atrocities and actual justice delivery reflects a notable disconnect, which is described as the “Crime-justice gap”. It represents the disparity between legislative intent and its practical outcomes. In the context of this study, this phenomenon is defined as the discrepancy between the initial reporting and registration of atrocity cases to its effective resolution. Therefore, a well-established comprehensive legislation cannot be evaluated merely through the volume of cases registered. Instead, true measure of legal effectiveness must be assessed by its ability to ensure systematic implementation, accessibility and rigorous execution.

*Author is pursuing her Ph.D. from Dept. of Political Science, University of Delhi
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



South Africa's post-apartheid debates on affirmative action reveal the tension between correcting historical injustice and sustaining social cohesion. Drawing parallels with India's caste-based policies, the article explores how societies can balance justice and unity, highlighting Dr. Ambedkar's vision and the Middle Path as enduring frameworks for democratic resilience.



When Justice Divides: Lessons from South Africa

Edward



Thirty-two years after the end of apartheid in South Africa, it has once again become a subject of discussion around the world. Recent developments in South Africa with respect to the post-apartheid era, debates on affirmative action, employment equity and economic empowerment have come to dominate the country's political and social discourse. Many South Africans support affirmative action measures, viewing it as an essential tool for correcting historical injustice. In contrast, there is a growing number of citizens, who argue that some of the policies are creating new forms of exclusion and deepening the resentment in society.

This is not a new debate or one that is only relevant to South Africa. Similar debates have

emerged in recent years in the United States too. Recent judicial decisions on affirmative action together with growing opposition to DEI in universities and employment have significantly influenced the implementation of such measures. Universities and employers have progressively scaled back or discontinued DEI policy. In Aotearoa New Zealand, debates surrounding Treaty of Waitangi, Māori rights and the attempt to redefine the interpretation of Treaty provisions through parliamentary processes have likewise generated intense public discussion.

This debate revolves around the issues of historical justice, equality and inclusion. Although the historical and social contexts differ considerably, these developments bring



to the fore a common challenge confronting democratic societies: How should a society address historical injustice without creating fresh divisions in the present?

There is no straightforward answer. In South Africa, the Black majority was systematically denied the right to equality, opportunity and dignity for decades under the apartheid regime. The effects of those policies did not disappear with the democratic transition of 1994. Economic inequality, educational disadvantage and social exclusion continued to affect millions of citizens long after apartheid formally ended.

In response, the South African state introduced a range of corrective measures intended to expand representation and opportunities for historically disadvantaged communities. Such policies were a moral and constitutional necessity for the South African society and not merely a political choice. No society can realistically expect centuries of exclusion to be overcome simply by declaring all citizens equal before the law.

However, over the years, another concern has emerged. A growing section of South African society argues that the corrective measures, at times, are being perceived as punitive or exclusionary towards those who did not themselves participate in the injustices of the past. These critics allege frequent discrimination in employment, education and economic opportunities. Some have gone to the extent of calling it as 'reverse apartheid' to describe their perception of the situation.

Whether one agrees with this characterisation or not, the very existence of such perceptions should concern the policymakers. The issue is not about legal justification of a policy but whether it retains sufficient public legitimacy to survive over generations. History teaches us that rights protected by constitutions are strongest when they are also reinforced by society.

This is where the South African experience offers important lessons for Indian policymakers. At first glance, India and South Africa appear very different. Their history, demography and social structures are not comparable in any realistic sense. Still, both societies have had to confront the consequences of deeply entrenched historical inequalities.

Indian society has witnessed centuries of caste-based exclusion and discrimination. Affirmative action measures such as reservations have emanated from the acknowledgement of the historical realities to ensure representation, equal rights and opportunities to the historically disadvantaged communities. Seventy-six

years later, these policies still remain the most debated welfare policy in the country. Perhaps, one crucial aspect of India's affirmative action discourse, often overlooked, is that the debate here is rarely about the need for these policies, but about their nature.

In contrast to the debate world over, the focus of the debate in India is seldom about whether affirmative action should exist at all. Instead, discussions generally revolve around questions of implementation. Who should be the beneficiary? How should benefits be distributed? Whether there is a need for sub-classification? Should the principle of creamy layer be introduced? Is there need to consider economic status of the beneficiary in addition to the social status? How can the policies be made more inclusive to reach the most deprived sections of the community? These are some of the points of disagreements, and they are significant. Yet, there is a broader acceptance of the principle of justice to correct the historical disadvantages. This is a remarkable achievement considering the fragmentation many countries have seen during such debates. India has been one of the most diverse societies – linguistic, ethnic, region, religion, and caste diversity. Despite the periodic tensions and disagreements, this diversity has failed to become a source of perpetual conflict. India has largely maintained a social and constitutional consensus on the necessity of addressing historical disadvantages.

This does not mean that all the issues are resolved. The fault lines still exist. The struggle for adequate representation and access to opportunities is an everyday reality for many depressed communities. Simultaneously, some sections of the society continue to express frustration regarding the functioning of the affirmative action policies. Crucially, the debate concentrates on reform rather than abolition.

This may well reflect a deeper characteristic of Indian civilisation. Throughout history, India has often faced a challenge of navigating diversity. Different faiths, languages, customs, rituals and social groups have successfully co-existed within a broader civilisational framework. Though frictions have certainly existed, yet there has always existed a definite tendency towards dialogue, mutual understanding and coexistence. Perhaps, the enduring lesson of Indian civilisation is that disagreements need not lead to disintegration.

The lessons arising out of the current situation in South Africa become particularly relevant in this context. Every society that seeks to correct historical injustice faces



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challenges in achieving a balancing act. If historical wrongs are ignored in the name of social harmony, feelings of indignation and unfairness keep accumulating. On the other hand, social trust begins to erode if corrective measures are perceived as benefitting one group while disadvantaging another. Both the outcomes carry risks to social cohesion. A society burdened by unresolved injustice and discrimination jeopardises social harmony and unity. Similarly, a society divided by mutual suspicion and resentment will struggle to maintain the support necessary for continuing the affirmative action policies. This is why the debate should not be framed as a choice between justice and social cohesion.

Modern political discourse often frames these objectives as mutually exclusive. One side argues that justice must be pursued regardless of social consequences. Another argues that social harmony should be prioritised over corrective measures. Both sides assume that these goals are fundamentally incompatible. The experience of countries such as India and South Africa suggests otherwise. Social

Justice and social cohesion are not competing objectives; they are mutually dependent. Dr B. R. Ambedkar perhaps expressed this relationship most succinctly while addressing the Constituent Assembly: "Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint." Justice cannot be delivered in a society fractured by inequality, discrimination and alienation. Likewise, social cohesion cannot be sustained where a large section of the society continues to experience exclusion and structural disadvantage. In the larger national context, we must recognise that social cohesion is essential not only for achieving justice and equality but it is equally indispensable for a nation's educational and economic progress while sustaining its democratic ethos. As Durkheim argued, social solidarity constitutes the moral foundation upon which stable societies are built. Such social cohesion is, in turn, a prerequisite for building a developed and progressive nation — one in which every citizen

is valued and every section of society sees itself as an equal stakeholder in the nation's future.

The long-term success of affirmative action therefore depends not merely on legal provisions or constitutional guarantees. It also depends upon maintaining public confidence that such measures are fair, necessary and directed towards the larger goal of national integration. India's experience provides an optimistic outlook for other societies grappling with corrective measures. Despite intense political and ideological differences, the society broadly remains committed to the promise of social justice and the constitutional provisions defined for the purpose. Debate continues, reforms are proposed and disagreements persist, but the underlying objective remains intact.

This characteristic can perhaps be attributed to the concept of "Majjhima Patipada", more commonly known as 'Madhyam Marg', or the Middle Path, as advocated by Buddha. Madhyam Marg does not seek victory of one ideology over another but endorses balance, it calls for avoiding extremes in order to achieve a lasting solution. It rejects both indifference to injustice and politics of permanent division. It holds that societies are strongest when they pursue social justice while simultaneously preserving the bonds that unite their people.

South Africa's ongoing conflict reminds us that correcting historical injustice is essential but so is preserving the social fabric of the nation. India's experience reminds us that corrective justice must remain connected to a broader sense of shared national purpose.

The way forward is clear. A society without cohesion can never deliver justice, and cohesion without justice cannot exist. The challenge for modern democracies is not to choose between justice and cohesion, but to find a balance enabling both to flourish together, ensuring lasting national unity.

*Author is Social Policy Researcher based
in New Delhi
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Accountability, Integrity, and Student Well-being Insights



Overseas Higher Education Scholarship & Schemes

This article summarizes SIWS (Social Interaction and Wellbeing Scale) findings from the test conducted by Social Studies Foundation for the college students from marginalized communities of India aspiring for higher education and professional success.

Deviprasad



The assessment evaluated strengths (Integrity, Accountability, Empathy, Growth Mindset), social behaviour (Compliance vs. Noncompliance and Conformity vs. Non-conformity) and stress responses (Hostility, Awfulization, Self-Downing, Low Frustration Tolerance).

Results indicate strong accountability, integrity. The results show elevated conformity and compliance. Emotional distress is largely internalized as guilt and low confidence rather than hostility. These findings support targeted counselling and developmental interventions.

The article also includes a summary of the personalized SIWS report shared with SSF students upon completion of the assessment.

Introduction and Objectives

The SIWS assessment is designed to evaluate psychological readiness among

students from marginalized communities of India aspiring for higher education in foreign countries and professional success. It measures positive strengths, interpersonal behaviour and irrational belief patterns to guide evidence-based interventions.

The assessment aims to:

1. Assess readiness for global academic and professional opportunities.
2. Understand emotional wellbeing and stress response patterns in students.

Methodology

Data were collected through the MiindKraft Psych Solutions digital assessment platform. The findings are based on a systematic statistical analysis of responses obtained from SSF students and a comparison sample of urban college students (for details see appendix B). The analyses included descriptive statistics,



Independent Samples t-tests, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and the Kruskal–Wallis test, as appropriate, to examine differences across groups and identify key psychological trends.

Findings

Comparative analyses revealed that SSF students scored significantly higher on the strengths of Accountability and Integrity, while the urban college sample demonstrated significantly higher levels of Empathy. No statistically significant difference was observed in Growth Mindset, indicating comparable levels of learning orientation and adaptability across both groups.

With respect to responses to negative situations, the urban college group reported significantly higher levels of Awfulization and Low Frustration Tolerance, whereas no significant differences were observed between the two groups on Hostility and Self-Downing.

Future studies should incorporate contextual variables and larger, more diverse samples to better understand the factors influencing students psychological profiles and to strengthen the evidence base for targeted interventions.

A key finding of the assessment was that SSF students demonstrated significantly higher levels of Compliance and Conformity compared to the urban college sample. Further analysis suggests that this behavioural pattern may be associated with greater tendencies towards guilt, self-blame, and reduced self-confidence, which may increase reliance on social approval and group norms while making independent decisions.

Gender-wise analysis indicated that male participants reported significantly higher levels of Self-Downing than female participants. No statistically significant differences were observed between students from urban and rural backgrounds within the SSF sample, suggesting that the identified psychological characteristics were consistent across geographical locations.

Interpretation

The findings indicate that SSF students possess strong foundational personal values, particularly in terms of accountability and integrity, reflecting a high degree of responsibility and ethical orientation. Their

level of growth mindset is comparable to that of urban college students, suggesting similar potential for learning, adaptability, and personal development.

SSF students demonstrated significantly higher levels of conformity and compliance, indicating a greater tendency to align with group expectations and external influences.

Internal analyses further suggest that these behavioural tendencies are associated with elevated levels of self-downing, characterized by self-doubt, guilt, and reduced self-confidence, rather than with hostility or emotional aggression.

This pattern highlights the need for targeted psychosocial interventions aimed at strengthening self-esteem, assertiveness, independent decision-making, and emotional resilience, thereby enabling students to utilize their existing strengths more effectively in academic, professional, and social settings.

A brief on SIWS Student Report

The SIWS Student Report is a personalized psychological feedback report designed to help students gain a deeper understanding of their personality strengths, social interaction patterns, and emotional responses to stressful situations. It begins by explaining the purpose of the assessment and the psychological constructs being measured, followed by an interpretation of the students dominant strengths, including accountability, integrity, empathy, and growth mindset. The report also highlights individual patterns of responding to stress, such as hostility, awfulization, self-downing, and low frustration tolerance, enabling students to recognize their characteristic thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Based on each students unique psychological profile, the report provides personalized recommendations and practical strategies to address their specific cognitive and emotional patterns. These include techniques to improve emotional regulation, challenge unhelpful thinking, strengthen resilience, develop assertiveness, enhance interpersonal relationships, and build healthier coping and problem-solving skills. The report serves as a self-awareness and personal development tool, empowering students to work on their psychological well-being and overall growth.

Recommendations

- Individual Counselling: Provide structured counselling sessions to address self-doubt, guilt, and low self-confidence.
- Self-Confidence & Self-Esteem Development: Conduct programmes to enhance self-belief, self-worth, and positive

SIWS Test Information & Objectives



Strengths/Values

Accountability



- Responsible
- Consistent
- Disciplined

Integrity



- Honest
- Ethical
- Candid

Growth Mindset



- Open Minded
- Innovative
- Adaptable

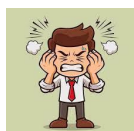
Empathy



- Inclusive
- Respectful
- Goal Driven

Stress Response Pattern

Frustration



- Quick Tempered
- Irritated
- Impulsive

Self Downing



- Low confidence
- Guilty, Sad
- Self blaming

Awfulization



- Overthinker
- Tensed, nervous
- Blowing things out of proportion

Hostility



- Mistrust
- Anger, Aggression
- Holding grudges

Social Behavior/Interaction

Compliance



- Agreeable
- Yes Man
- Compliant

Conformity



- Follower
- Conventional
- Group Driven

No Compliance



- Questioning
- Assertive
- Skeptical

No Conformity



- Individualistic
- Self-driven
- Thoughtful

MindKraft

self-perception.

- Assertiveness Decision-Making Training: Equip students with skills to express their opinions confidently, set healthy boundaries, and make independent decisions.

Communication & Interpersonal Skills: Strengthen verbal, written, and interpersonal communication to improve academic and professional interactions.

Emotional Resilience Workshops: Develop healthy coping strategies to manage stress, setbacks, and uncertainty effectively.

Employability & Professional Readiness: Provide training in workplace competencies, interview skills, teamwork, and professional conduct.

English Language Enhancement: Strengthen spoken and written English to improve academic performance and global career readiness.

Mentorship Programme: Pair students with mentors to provide guidance, encouragement, and role models for personal and professional growth.

Reflective Learning Practices: Encourage journaling, self-reflection, and goal-setting to promote self-awareness and continuous development.

Periodic Psychometric Assessment: Conduct regular assessments to monitor psychological development, evaluate intervention outcomes, and provide individualized support.

Limitations

The present findings are based on the available sample and should be interpreted

with appropriate caution. A larger sample size, particularly for the urban comparison group, would improve the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

While the study identifies significant differences between groups, additional statistical analyses are required to establish the strength and nature of relationships among the measured variables.

The SIWS assessment measures psychological characteristics but does not assess the environmental, familial, educational, or socio-economic factors that may contribute to higher levels of self-downing, conformity, or compliance. Therefore, the underlying causes of these patterns cannot be determined from the present data.

Future studies should incorporate contextual variables and larger, more diverse samples to better understand the factors influencing students' psychological profiles and to strengthen the evidence base for targeted interventions.

Conclusion

The SIWS offers a valuable evidence-based framework for understanding the strengths and psychosocial needs of SSF students. It demonstrates considerable developmental potential while identifying practical intervention priorities to improve confidence, resilience and educational outcomes.

*Author is a Director, Miindkraft Solutions, a company works in the field of Psychometry
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Hostel Support Is Social Justice in Practice

For students from backward classes and economically weaker families, a hostel is not a convenience. It is part of the bridge that connects constitutional promise with real access to education.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's findings on Maharashtra's government and aided hostels show that the system meant to support these students is deeply compromised. The report points to unspent funds, vacant posts, poor infrastructure, and weak monitoring — all in a sector that should have been treated as essential educational infrastructure, not an afterthought. In public policy terms, hostel support is affirmative action in practice, because it addresses the unequal starting point from which marginalized students enter higher education.



The constitutional basis for this responsibility is clear. Article 46 directs the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other weaker sections, and to protect them from social injustice and exploitation. That principle does not stop at classroom admission. It extends to the conditions that allow a student to remain in education with dignity, including food, housing, sanitation, and safety.

Historically, the struggle for access in Indian education has never been only about seats. It has been about the cost of staying in the system. For first-generation learners, students from rural areas, and children from families with limited income, hostel support reduces the hidden cost of education: rent, travel, meals, and daily survival. Studies on marginalized students in Indian higher education continue to show that financial constraints and living conditions remain major barriers even after formal inclusion policies exist. That is why hostel provision must be seen as a core social-justice measure, not charity.

The CAG report paints a disturbing picture. Of the ₹487 crore allocated for government hostels in 2023–24, INR 56.65 crore was not spent. The

state had also failed to follow through on a plan to open hostels in every taluka, leaving about 8,930 students in 117 talukas without hostel access. The audit found 49 government hostels with vacant superintendent posts, and in five girls' hostels, men were appointed as superintendents. That alone raises questions about supervision, safety, and accountability.

The government had spent INR 2,321 crore on these hostels during the review period, yet basic facilities were missing in many places: dining halls, computer labs, libraries, magazines and newspapers, colour TVs, CCTV, and inverters. The report also points to everyday neglect. Regular medical check-ups were not conducted. In some hostels, students had to sit on the floor to eat because there were no tables and chairs. In others, there was no dining hall at all. For disabled students, even the basic logic of accessibility was ignored, with facilities placed on upper floors instead of the ground floor in several hostels.

Perhaps the most worrying part of the audit is the evidence of suspicious functioning. In several cases, hostels were found empty or non-functional despite official records showing occupancy and staffing. Similar conditions were reported in some other hostels, where no students or staff were found. The CAG has said that funds were also siphoned off in such fake hostel cases. This is not just waste. It is a betrayal of the very students the system was designed to protect.

A good hostel does more than provide a bed. It creates stability. It gives students time to study, space to rest, access to food, and an environment where academic work is possible. When hostels fail, the burden shifts back to families that are already under strain. When hostels are absent, students from marginalized communities are effectively told that formal admission is not enough.

That is why many developed nations treat student accommodation and subsidised food as part of the education system itself. They understand that learning outcomes are affected by housing, nutrition, and hygiene, not just classroom teaching. The principle is simple: if the state wants equitable education, it must make student life liveable. Developing countries should adopt this standard, not as an imported luxury, but as a practical model of inclusion and efficiency.



My experience at China Foreign Affairs University showed how student accommodation, subsidised food, cleanliness, and hygiene can support academic focus and dignity. The message was clear: when institutions take care of basic living conditions, students can focus on learning rather than survival. That is a lesson developing nations should absorb seriously, especially when they speak about inclusion and educational equity.

A hostel system built for backward-class and economically weaker students cannot be run with vacant posts, underused budgets, inaccessible facilities, and paper-only compliance. If hostels are to serve their purpose, the state must treat them as a constitutional obligation linked to affirmative action and not as a discretionary welfare add-on.

Reform must begin with strict monitoring, transparent occupancy records, regular inspections, functioning superintendents, proper mess facilities, accessible buildings, and reliable health and hygiene standards. Funding must be tied to outcomes, not just allocations. Above all, student dignity must become the benchmark.

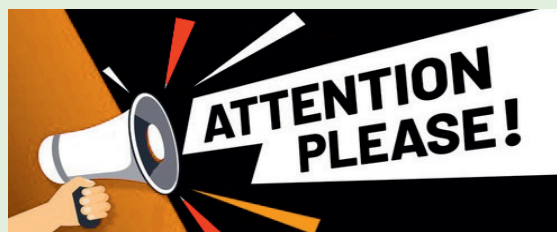
A society that claims to expand education cannot leave its most vulnerable students to fend for themselves after admission. For Maharashtra's marginalized students, dignified hostel facilities are not optional. They are the difference between inclusion on paper and inclusion in life.

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

Centre Disburses ₹7,981 Crore for SC Students' Education in FY26

The Centre has disbursed over ₹7,981 crore to more than 75 lakh Scheduled Caste (SC) students during 2025–26 under various educational support schemes, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment said.

the Department is implementing several schemes aimed at the educational empowerment of Scheduled Caste students as part of its broader social justice initiatives. expenditure on SC welfare schemes has shown consistent growth.



The 21 per cent increase in spending under the Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme for SCs and others, while noting that the Department also implements welfare programmes for OBCs, senior citizens, transgender persons, manual scavengers, sanitation workers and Economically Weaker Sections.

Rajasthan Police Directs Officials to Replace 'Dalit' With 'Scheduled Caste' in Official Records

The Rajasthan Police has directed all officers to stop using the term "Dalit" in official records and verbal communication, instructing them to use the legally recognised term "Scheduled

Caste" or "Anusoochit Jaati" instead.

The July 2 directive has been circulated to all police units across the state. It states that the term "Dalit" should neither be spoken nor written in official government communication.

Under the new instructions, "Dalit" will no longer be used in FIRs, complaints, charge sheets, panchnamas, arrest memos, custody documents, case diaries, closure reports, official forms, applications, certificates and departmental correspondence.

West Bengal Orders Re-Verification of All Caste Certificates Issued Since 2011

The West Bengal government has ordered the re-verification of all Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) caste certificates issued since 2011 following concerns over the authenticity of some documents.

According to official records, nearly 1.69 crore caste certificates have been issued during this period, many through the Duare Sarkar outreach programme. The government has directed Sub-Divisional Officers and district authorities to scrutinise all certificates and cancel any found to have been issued based on false information or irregularities, following due process.

The exercise will also cover caste certificates of individuals whose names were recently deleted from the electoral rolls during the Special Revision of the voter list, along with those of their dependents, if found ineligible.

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



DIN VISHESH



18th July
Death Anniversary
and 1st August Birth
Anniversary of Anna
Bhau Sathe



18th July
Sant Namdev
Death Anniversary



13th August
Ahilyabai Holkar
Death Anniversary

Remembering Udham Singh

31st July
Uddham Singh
Death Anniversary



Udham Singh was a revolutionary freedom fighter whose act of defiance became a symbol of India's struggle against colonial oppression. Born in 1899 in Sunam, Punjab, he witnessed the horrific Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, where hundreds of innocent Indians were killed under the orders of British officer Michael O'Dwyer. This event deeply impacted Singh and shaped his lifelong resolve to avenge the atrocity. After years of preparation and exile, he assassinated O'Dwyer in London on March 13, 1940, as a direct act of retribution for the massacre. His trial and execution later that year turned him into a martyr for India's independence movement. Singh's courage reflected not only personal vengeance but also a broader protest against imperial injustice. He adopted the name "Ram Mohammad Singh Azad" to signify unity among India's major religions—Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh—underscoring his vision of a free and inclusive nation. Remembered as "Shaheed Udham Singh," his sacrifice continues to inspire generations, reminding India that freedom was won through immense courage, conviction, and the refusal to forget historical wrongs. His legacy stands as a testament to resistance against tyranny and the enduring spirit of justice.

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