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The background features a large, light blue map of India. Several regions are highlighted in different colors: the southern tip is red and green, the western coast is yellow, and the northeastern part is orange. The map is set against a dark blue background with a faint, repeating pattern of silhouettes of people.

**Is India's
Political
Landscape
Changing ?**



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EDITORIAL

Reserved Constituencies & India's Changing Political Landscape

The electoral trends emerging from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) reserved constituencies across states such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry between the 2021 and 2026 Assembly elections reveal far more than routine political fluctuations. They point towards a deeper transformation underway within Indian society — one where historically marginalised communities are increasingly asserting independent political agency, moving beyond inherited loyalties and reshaping the country's electoral landscape in unexpected ways.

For decades after Independence, SC and ST voting patterns in many regions remained closely tied to established social coalitions crafted by dominant national or regional parties. Political allegiance was often built around historical identity narratives, caste arithmetic, welfare patronage and localised organisational control. But the latest electoral outcomes suggest that this older political framework is steadily weakening.

Today's SC and ST voters appear more politically fluid, aspirational and performance-oriented than before. Governance, representation, welfare delivery, cultural identity, leadership credibility and political dignity now seem to matter as much as — and in some cases more than — traditional caste or ideological alignments.

Perhaps the most striking example of this transformation can be seen in West Bengal. The dramatic rise of the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party among SC and ST communities represents one of the most

significant social shifts in Bengal's recent political history. What was once considered an unlikely social base for the BJP has now become one of its strongest pillars.

The BJP's sweeping dominance in Bengal's ST-reserved constituencies and overwhelming gains in SC seats indicate that many marginalised voters are no longer responding solely to older class-based or regional political narratives. Instead, issues such as welfare access, political participation, local grievances, religious identity and social integration appear to have reshaped electoral preferences.

This shift also reflects a broader ideological undercurrent visible across parts of India — the gradual emergence of a political framework that seeks to integrate caste identities within a larger Hindu civilisational narrative. While critics often dismiss this as mere electoral Hindutva, its appeal among sections of SC and ST communities cannot be ignored. For many voters, especially in regions experiencing social fragmentation or political violence, the language of cultural unity and national belonging appears to offer both emotional and political reassurance.

At the same time, these elections also demonstrate that there is no uniform national pattern. In Kerala, for instance, the shift among SC and ST voters moved largely towards the Congress-led political space rather than the BJP. This reflects the distinct social and political character of the state, where local leadership structures, welfare politics and minority-community equations continue to shape electoral behaviour significantly.

Yet even in Kerala, the underlying story

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remains similar — voters are no longer permanently tied to historical political monopolies. The weakening of Left dominance among reserved constituencies indicates that marginalised communities are increasingly willing to reassess political loyalties when governance fatigue, organisational stagnation or leadership disconnect become visible.

Tamil Nadu offers another important insight. The emergence of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam as a major force in SC-reserved constituencies signals growing impatience with the traditional Dravidian binary represented by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Dalit voters in the state appear increasingly open to alternative political platforms that promise stronger representation, fresh leadership and a departure from entrenched political structures.

This is politically significant because Tamil Nadu's social justice discourse has historically revolved around anti-caste and Dravidian identity politics. The growing fragmentation of that traditional consensus suggests that younger voters, including those from marginalised communities, may now be looking beyond old ideological frameworks towards more aspirational and leadership-centric politics.

Assam, meanwhile, reflects the consolidation of a different political phenomenon — the successful expansion of the BJP-led alliance among tribal and SC communities through welfare outreach, regional alliances and strong organisational penetration. The steady erosion of the Congress in these segments points towards the decline of a once-dominant political culture that increasingly struggles to adapt to changing social aspirations and regional realities.

Importantly, these shifts should not be viewed only through the narrow lens of electoral arithmetic. They also reflect broader changes within Indian democracy itself. SC

and ST communities are no longer behaving as passive vote banks managed by elite political intermediaries. Their political choices are becoming more assertive, strategic and issue-based.

There is also a generational dimension to this transition. Younger voters from marginalised communities are growing up in an India shaped by mobility, digital communication, welfare expansion and rising national consciousness. Their political expectations are therefore different from earlier generations. Representation alone is no longer sufficient; they increasingly demand visibility, participation, development and dignity within the broader national mainstream.

This changing political behaviour may ultimately strengthen Indian democracy. Electoral fluidity forces parties to continuously engage with communities rather than taking them for granted. It also weakens the culture of permanent political entitlement that dominated many states for decades.

At the same time, the growing centrality of reserved constituencies in ideological contests carries both opportunities and risks. On one hand, it allows historically marginalised groups to become decisive participants in shaping national politics. On the other, there remains the danger that competitive identity mobilisation could deepen social polarisation if not balanced by inclusive governance and social harmony.

Nevertheless, one broad conclusion is becoming increasingly clear. India's SC and ST voters are no longer politically predictable. They are emerging as independent democratic actors capable of redefining electoral outcomes across states and challenging old political assumptions.

The reserved constituency is no longer a peripheral political category. It has become one of the most important arenas where the future social and ideological direction of Indian politics is now being negotiated.





New Political Trend Emerging In India?

In recent Assembly elections of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam and Puducherry a major electoral transformation among SC and ST voters between 2021 and 2026. Traditional party dominance eroded as communities shifted toward new leadership, with BJP consolidating in Assam and Bengal, Congress rising in Kerala, and TVK emerging in Tamil Nadu—signalling fluid, decisive voter realignments.

Satyajit

The voting patterns in the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) reserved constituencies across several Indian states and Union Territories between the 2021 and 2026 Assembly elections reveal important shifts in the country's political and social landscape. These results are not merely constituency-level electoral outcomes; they reflect broader changes in political alignments, social coalitions and the evolving aspirations of historically marginalised communities.

Across states such as West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, the data indicates that SC and ST voters are no longer politically fixed within traditional party structures. In several regions, established parties witnessed significant erosion of support, while

newer or expanding political forces succeeded in building fresh social bases among reserved category voters.

The elections also underline how reserved constituencies have increasingly become central battlegrounds for larger ideological and organisational contests. National parties, regional formations and emerging political players all attempted to consolidate support among SC and ST communities through welfare politics, identity mobilisation, local leadership networks and targeted campaign strategies.

A notable feature of these electoral trends is the decline of older political monopolies in many states. Parties that historically depended on caste-based or legacy social coalitions have faced serious challenges from competitors

capable of reshaping political narratives and organisational outreach. At the same time, some regional parties managed to retain influence in pockets where local leadership and social connection remained strong.

The results further demonstrate that SC and ST voters are exercising greater electoral fluidity and independence than before. Their voting behaviour increasingly appears linked to governance perceptions, political representation, welfare delivery, organisational credibility and leadership appeal rather than long-standing political loyalties alone.

Taken together, these electoral shifts provide a significant insight into the changing dynamics of Indian politics, where reserved constituencies are emerging not as peripheral segments, but as decisive arenas shaping broader political outcomes and future party strategies.

TAMIL NADU

The electoral shift in the Scheduled Caste-reserved constituencies of Tamil Nadu between the 2021 and 2026 Assembly elections reflects a major political realignment in the state's Dalit voter base. The most striking development is the dramatic rise of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), which emerged as the single largest force in SC-reserved constituencies in 2026 by winning 22 out of 44 seats, exactly 50 per cent of the total reserved seats.



In contrast, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which dominated these constituencies in 2021 with 21 seats or 47 per cent, suffered a steep decline. By 2026, the DMK's tally fell to just 11 seats, reducing its share to 25 per cent.

This sharp drop indicates significant erosion in the party's support among Scheduled Caste voters, a segment that had long been considered part of the DMK-led social coalition.

All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) also witnessed a decline, though less severe. From 16 seats in 2021, its tally came down to 7 in 2026, reducing its share from 36 per cent to 16 per cent. The result suggests that both traditional Dravidian majors lost substantial ground to the emerging TVK.

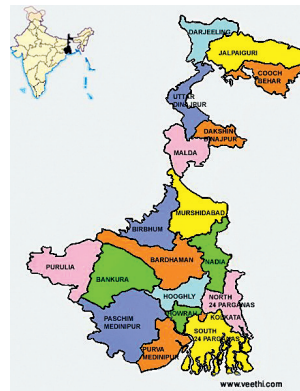
Meanwhile, Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi

(VCK) maintained a modest but stable presence with two seats in both elections, while the Left parties — Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India — retained marginal representation.

Overall, the 2026 outcome signals a major churn in Tamil Nadu's SC-reserved constituencies. The rise of TVK suggests that Dalit voters are increasingly willing to move beyond the traditional Dravidian binary in search of alternative political leadership and representation.

WEST BENGAL

The 2026 Assembly election results in West Bengal reveal a decisive political transformation among Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) voters, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) making unprecedented gains in communities that were once seen as outside its



traditional support base. The results clearly indicate a deep saffronisation of Bengal's SC and ST electoral landscape.

In the 2021 Assembly elections, the SC-reserved constituencies had reflected a perfectly balanced contest between the BJP and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC/TMC). Out of 68 SC-reserved seats, both parties won 34 each, sharing the political space equally. However, the 2026 results completely altered this equation. The BJP surged to 56 seats, capturing nearly 82 per cent of the SC-reserved constituencies, while the TMC collapsed to just 12 seats, reduced to around 17 per cent.

The transformation in the ST-reserved constituencies is even more dramatic. In 2021, the TMC had maintained an edge by winning 9 out of 14 ST-reserved seats, while the BJP secured seven seats, making strong inroads into tribal regions. But by 2026, the BJP achieved total dominance, sweeping all 14 ST-reserved constituencies and securing 100 per cent control over the tribal electoral map of Bengal.

These results are politically significant because they demonstrate that the BJP has successfully expanded beyond its earlier urban and upper-caste image. The party has managed to build deep social penetration among historically marginalised communities by combining welfare outreach, strong booth-



level organisation, Hindutva mobilisation and identity-based political messaging.

For decades, Bengal's SC and ST communities were cultivated by Left parties and later by the TMC through regional and welfare-driven politics. However, the 2026 mandate suggests growing disillusionment with the TMC among these communities. Allegations of corruption, political violence, local-level syndicate culture and the perception of selective appeasement appear to have weakened the party's credibility among many SC and ST voters.

The BJP, on the other hand, successfully projected itself as a vehicle of political assertion and cultural integration for these communities. In regions like Junglemahal and large parts of North Bengal, the party's narrative of nationalism, welfare delivery and Hindu unity appears to have resonated strongly.

The complete saffronisation of Bengal's ST-reserved seats and overwhelming dominance in SC constituencies mark a historic social shift in the state's politics. What was once considered impossible in Bengal — the consolidation of SC and ST voters behind the BJP — has now become a defining feature of the state's new political reality.

PUDUCHERRY

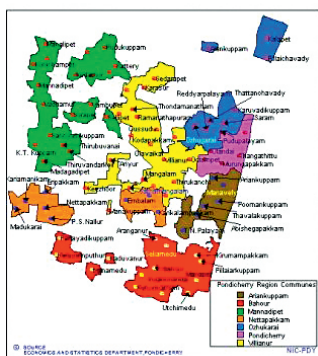
The electoral trends in the Scheduled Caste-reserved constituencies of Puducherry between the 2021 and 2026 Assembly elections indicate a fragmented and competitive political landscape rather than the dominance of a single party.

In the 2021 Assembly election, the All India N.R. Congress (AINRC) emerged as the dominant force in the five SC-reserved constituencies by winning three seats, accounting for 60 per cent of the reserved segment. The Bharatiya Janata

Party (BJP) and an independent candidate secured one seat each, representing 20 per cent each of the SC-reserved constituencies.

However, the 2026 election reflected a more dispersed mandate. The AINRC's tally dropped from three seats to two,

reducing its share from 60 per cent to 40 per cent. Meanwhile, the Indian National Congress (INC), Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) and an independent candidate won one seat each, capturing 20 per cent each of the SC-reserved



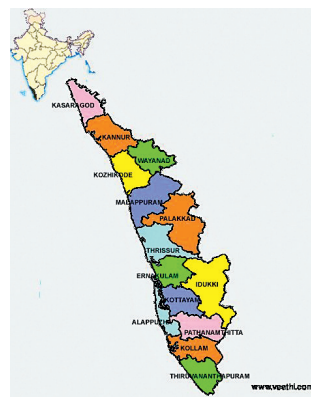
constituencies.

The results suggest that SC voters in Puducherry are no longer voting in a consolidated manner behind one dominant regional force. Instead, political preferences appear increasingly divided among regional, national and emerging parties. The entry of TVK into the SC electoral space also points toward changing voter behaviour and the search for alternative political representation beyond traditional alliances.

KERALAM

The electoral trends in the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) reserved constituencies of Kerala between the 2021 and 2026 Assembly elections reveal a significant political shift from the Left camp towards the Indian National Congress (INC)-led space, particularly among marginalised communities.

In the 2021 Assembly election, the Left parties dominated the SC-reserved constituencies. Out of 14 SC seats, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI(M) won eight seats, accounting for 57 per cent of the total, while the Communist



Party of India (CPI) secured four seats or 29 per cent. The remaining two seats were won by an Independent and the Congress, with one seat each. This reflected the continued hold of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) over Kerala's SC political landscape in 2021.

However, the 2026 Assembly election witnessed a major reversal. The Congress emerged as the dominant force in SC-reserved constituencies by winning eight out of 14 seats, capturing 57 per cent of the SC electoral segment. The CPI(M), which had earlier led the space, was reduced to just four seats or 29 per cent. The CPI and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) won one seat each.

The change was even more pronounced in the ST-reserved constituencies. In 2021, the two ST seats were evenly divided between the CPI(M) and Congress, with each winning one seat. But in 2026, the Congress swept both ST-reserved constituencies, securing 100 per cent representation in the tribal segment.

These results suggest a clear erosion of Left dominance among Kerala's SC and ST voters. The Congress appears to have successfully

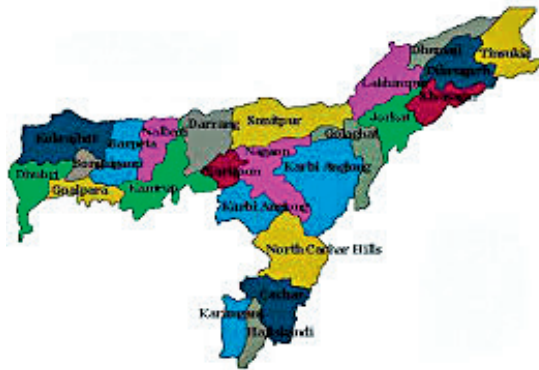


expanded its support among marginalised communities, transforming the social and electoral balance in reserved constituencies across the state.

ASSAM

The electoral trends in the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) reserved constituencies of Assam between the 2021 and 2026 Assembly elections reflect the growing consolidation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led political space among marginalised communities in the state.

In the 2021 Assembly election, the SC-reserved constituencies witnessed a relatively balanced contest. Out of 8 reserved seats, the



Indian National Congress (INC) won 4 seats, accounting for 50 per cent of the SC-reserved segment. The BJP secured 3 seats or 38 per cent, while Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), an ally of the BJP, won 1 seat, representing 12 per cent.

However, the 2026 Assembly election marked a major shift in favour of the BJP-led alliance. Out of nine SC-reserved constituencies, the BJP won five seats, securing 56 per cent representation, while the AGP captured three seats or 33 per cent. The Congress was reduced to just 1 seat, accounting for only 11 per cent of the SC-reserved constituencies. Taken together, the BJP-AGP alliance dominated nearly the entire SC political landscape in Assam.

The trend in the ST-reserved constituencies was even more significant. In 2021, the BJP had already emerged as the leading force by winning nine out of 16 ST-reserved seats, accounting for 57 per cent. United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) secured 5 seats or 31 per cent, while the Congress and Bodoland People's Front (BPF) won one seat each.

By 2026, the BJP further expanded its influence in tribal constituencies. Out of 19 ST-reserved seats, the BJP won 13 seats, capturing 68 per cent of the tribal electoral segment. The remaining 6 seats were won by the BPF, while the Congress and UPPL failed to register any

presence in the ST-reserved constituencies.

The results indicate a decisive consolidation of SC and ST voters behind the BJP-led political framework in Assam. Welfare politics, strong regional alliances, tribal outreach and the BJP's sustained organisational expansion appear to have significantly weakened the Congress among these communities.

The 2026 outcome also highlights the shrinking social base of the Congress in Assam. Once influential among marginalised communities, the party now appears increasingly peripheral in both SC and ST electoral segments, while the BJP has successfully emerged as the dominant political force across reserved constituencies in the state.

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However, the 2026 Assembly election marked a major shift in favour of the BJP-led alliance. Out of 9 SC-reserved constituencies, the BJP won 5 seats, securing 56 per cent representation, while the AGP captured three seats or 33 per cent. The Congress was reduced to just 1 seat, accounting for only 11 per cent of the SC-reserved constituencies. Taken together, the BJP-AGP alliance dominated nearly the entire SC political landscape in Assam.

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The Assembly elections of 2021 and 2026 across Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Puducherry, Kerala, and Assam reveal striking shifts in Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) reserved constituencies. In Tamil Nadu, DMK's dominance in 2021 gave way to the rise of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) in 2026, securing half of SC seats. West Bengal witnessed a dramatic swing, with BJP overtaking AITC by winning 82% SC seats and all ST constituencies in 2026. Puducherry saw AINRC's majority in 2021 reduced to a fragmented outcome in 2026, with INC and TVK gaining ground. Kerala's SC seats shifted from CPI(M) to INC, while ST seats moved entirely to INC in 2026. Assam reflected BJP's consolidation, expanding its hold over both SC and ST constituencies. These results highlight evolving political alignments, regional party emergence, and the growing influence of national parties in reserved constituencies.

Shifting Mandates in Reserved Constituencies

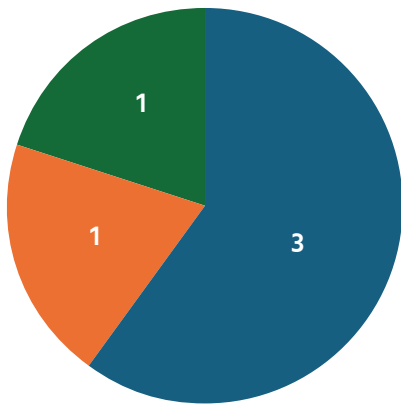




PUDUCHERRY 2021

In the 2021 Puducherry Assembly Election, five constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Castes. The All India N.R. Congress (AINRC) secured three of these seats, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and an Independent candidate won one seat each. This means AINRC capturing 60% of the SC-reserved seats, with BJP and the Independent candidate accounting for 20% each seats.

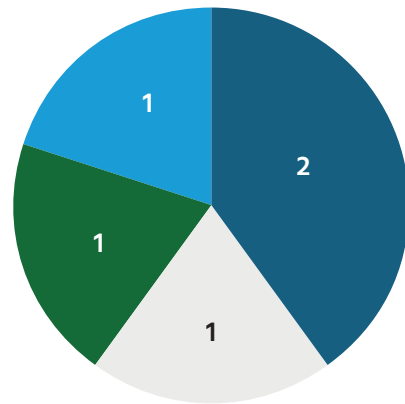
SC Seats won-2021



PUDUCHERRY 2026

In 2026 Puducherry Assembly Election, The All India N.R. Congress (AINRC) secured two seats, while the Indian National Congress, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam and Independent candidate won one seat each. This means AINRC capturing 40% of the SC-reserved seats, with INC, TVK and the Independent candidates won 20% seats each.

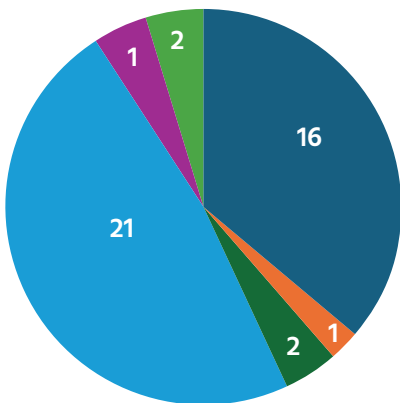
SC Seats won-2026



TAMILNADU 2021

In the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly Election, 44 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Castes. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam- DMK won 21 seats, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam- ADMK won 16 seats, Communist Party of India (M), Indian National Congress & Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi-VCK won 2 seats each and Communist Party of India won 1 seat. This means DMK captured 47%, ADMK won 36%, 5% seats won by CPI(M), INC and VCK and CPI won 2% seats from the SC-reserved seats.

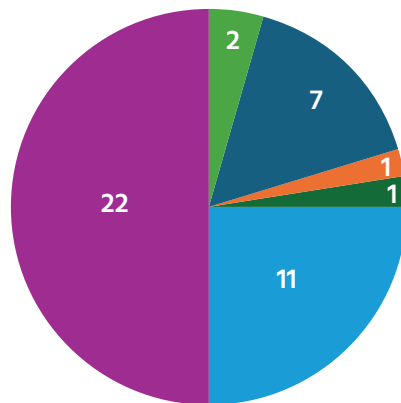
SC Seats won-2021



TAMILNADU- 2026

In the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly Election, 44 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Castes. Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam- TVK won 22 seats, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-DMK won 11 seats, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam- ADMK won 7 seats, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi-VCK won 2 seats and Communist Party of India (M) and Communist Party of India won 1 seat each. This means TVK captured 50%, DMK won 25%,ADMK won 16%, VCK won 5% & CPI(M) and CPM(I) won 2% seats won from the SC-reserved seats.

SC Seats won-2026

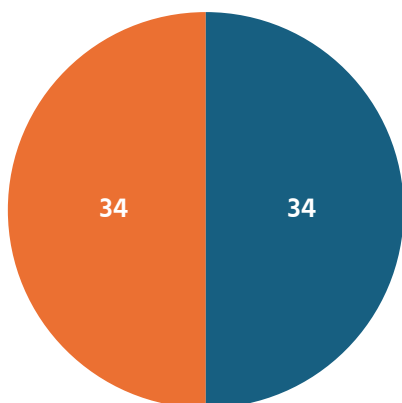




WEST BENGAL 2021 SC

In the 2021 West Bengal Assembly Election, 68 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Castes. All India Trinmool Congress-AITC and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 34 seats each. This means AITC and BJP shared 50% each of the SC-reserved seats.

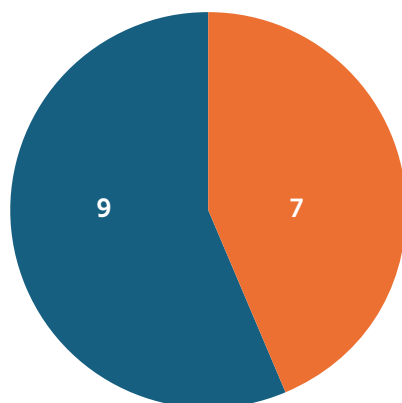
SC Seats won-2021



WEST BENGAL 2021 ST

In the 2021 West Bengal Assembly Election, 14 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Tribes. All India Trinmool Congress-AITC won 9 seats and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 7 seats. This means AITC won 56% seats and BJP won remaining 44% of the ST-reserved seats.

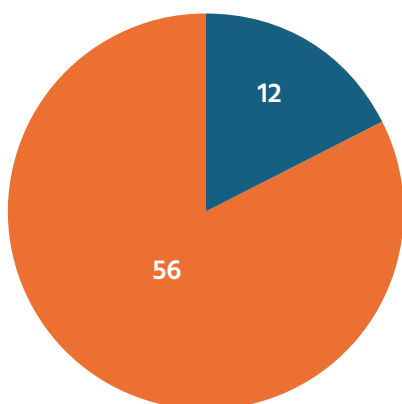
ST Seats won-2021



WEST BENGAL 2026 SC

In the 2026 West Bengal Assembly Election, out of 68 constituencies Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 56 seats and All India Trinmool Congress-AITC won 12 seats from SC reserved Constituencies. BJP shared 82% and AITC won 17% seats from the SC-reserved seats.

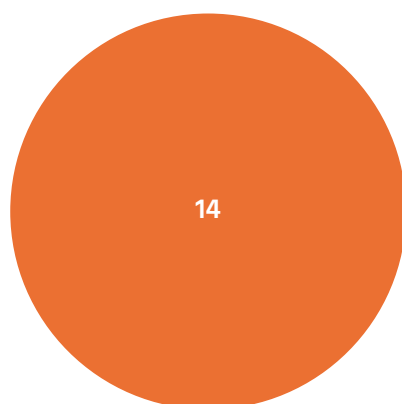
SC Seats won-2021



WEST BENGAL 2026 ST

In the 2026 West Bengal Assembly Election, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won all 14 seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes. BJP won 100% seats reserved for ST.

ST Seats won-2026

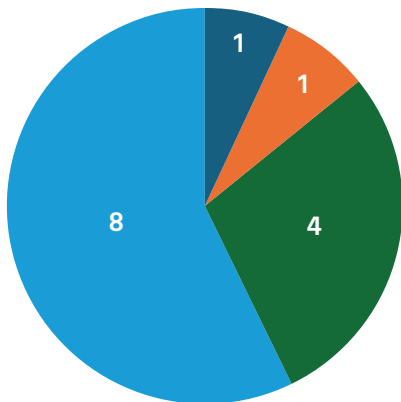




KERALA 2021-SC

In the 2021 Kerala Assembly Election, 14 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Castes. Communist Party of India(M) secured 8 of these seats, Communist Party of India won 4 seats & Independent candidate along with Indian National Congress candidate won one seat each. This means CPI(M) capturing 57% of the SC-reserved seats, 29% seats won by CPI, and Independent & INC shared 7% seats among themselves from SC reserved constituencies.

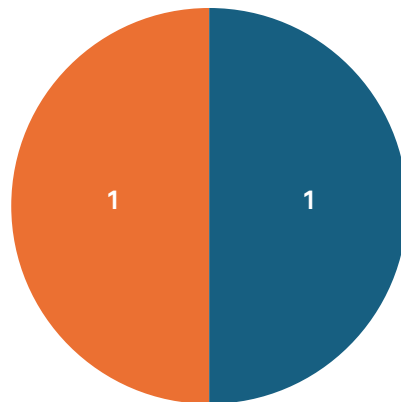
SC Seats won-2021



KERALA 2021-ST

In the 2021 Kerala Assembly Election, 2 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Tribes. Communist Party of India(M) along with Indian National Congress candidate won one seat each. This means CPI(M) and INC won 50% each of the ST-reserved seats.

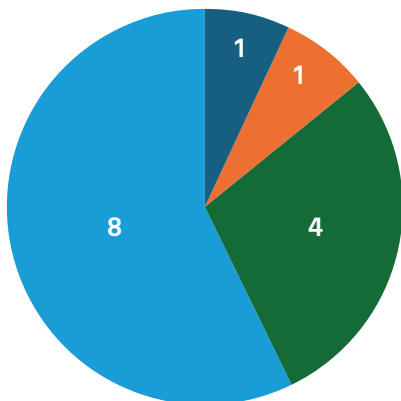
ST Seats won-2021



KERALA 2026 SC

In the 2026 Kerala Assembly Election, out of 14 reserved constituencies for Scheduled Castes, Indian National Congress won 8 seats, Communist Party of India(M) secured 4 & Communist Party of India and Revolutionary Socialist Party won 1 seat each. This means INC captured 57% of the SC-reserved seats, 29% seats won by CPI (M), and Communist Party of India & Revolutionary Socialist Party shared 7% seats among themselves from SC reserved constituencies.

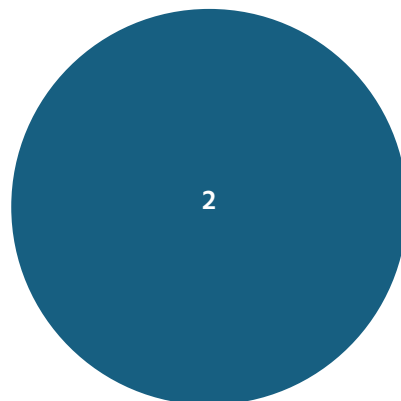
SC Seats won-2026



KERALA 2026-ST

In the 2026 Kerala Assembly Election, Indian National Congress won both the seats reserved for ST. This means INC won 100% ST-reserved seats.

ST Seats won-2026

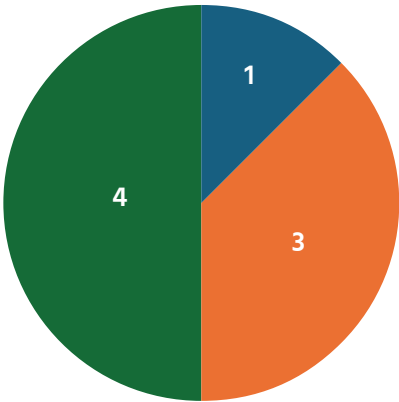




ASSAM 2021 SC

In the 2021 Assam Assembly Election, 8 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Castes. Indian National Congress candidates won 4 seats; BJP won 3 seats and Asom Gana Parishad won 1 seat. This means INC captured 50% of the SC-reserved seats, 38% seats won by BJP, and AGP won 12% seats from SC reserved constituencies.

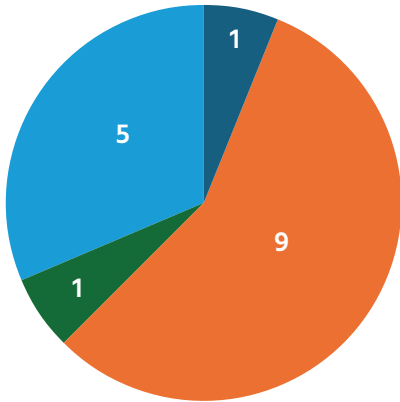
SC Seats won-2021



ASSAM 2021 ST

In the 2021 Assam Assembly Election, 16 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Tribes. BJP won 9 seats, United People's Party, Liberal- UPPL won 5 seats, INC and Bodoland People's Front-BOPF won 1 seat each from ST reserved constituencies. This means BJP captured 57% seats, 31% seats won by UPPL, INC and BOPF won 6% seats each from ST reserved constituencies.

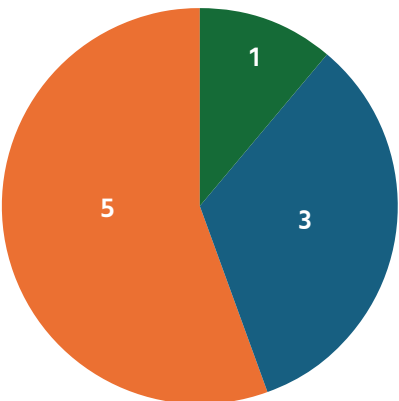
ST Seats won-2021



ASSAM 2026 SC

In the 2026 Assam Assembly Election, Out of 9 reserved Constituencies for Scheduled Castes. BJP won 5 seats, Asom Gana Parishad won 3 seats and INC won 1 seat. BJP secured 56% of the SC-reserved seats, 33% seats won by AGP, and INC won 11% seats from SC reserved constituencies.

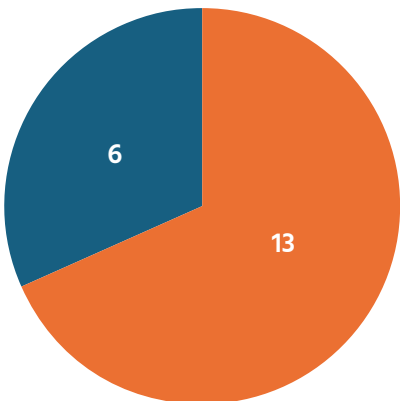
SC Seats won-2026



ASSAM 2026 ST

In the 2026 Assam Assembly Election, 19 constituencies were reserved for Scheduled Tribes. BJP won 13 seats, and Bodoland People's Front-BOPF won 6 seat from ST reserved constituencies. This means BJP captured 68% seats and BOPF won 32% seats from ST reserved constituencies.

ST Seats won-2026



Women Political Representation and Deprived Women

Dr. Ekta Raman

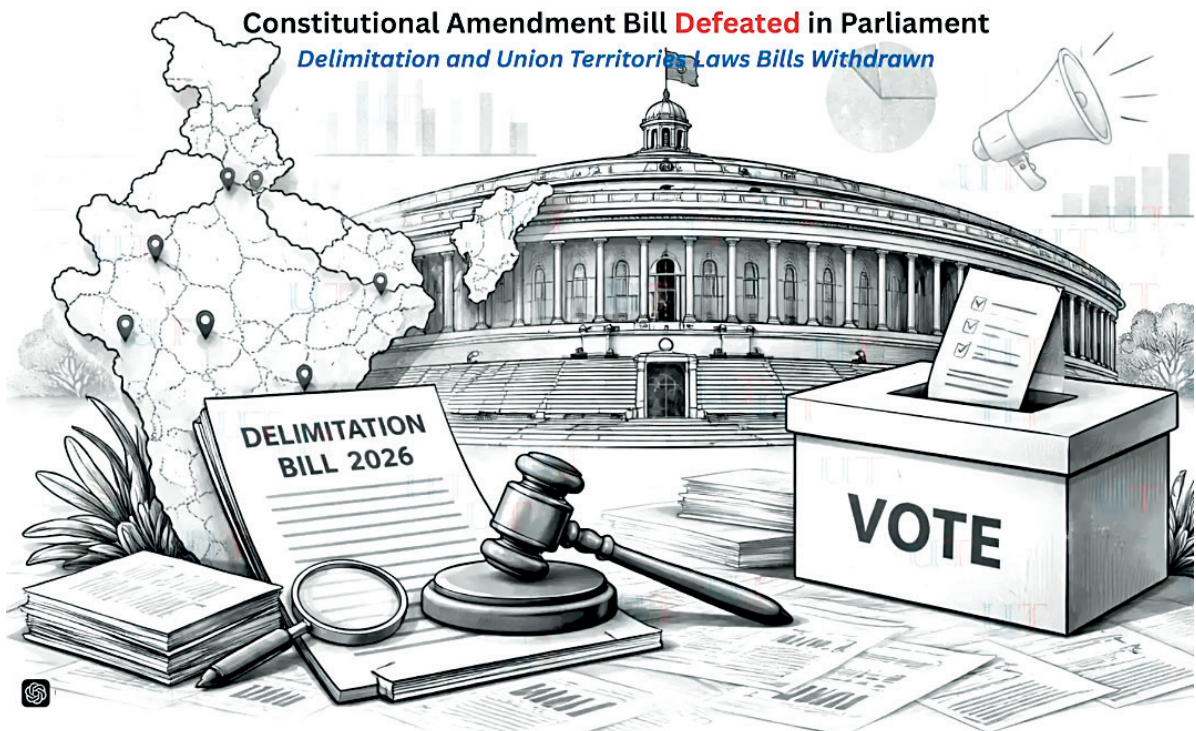
Dr. Ekta Raman examines the 106th Constitutional Amendment, reserving one-third of seats for women in legislatures, including SC/ST sub-quotas. Framed as a historic step toward inclusive democracy, it highlights empowerment, gender equality, and challenges of implementation, aiming to reshape India's political landscape with greater representation and participation.

The Women's Reservation Amendment, officially known as the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, marks one of the most significant constitutional reforms in modern Indian democracy. Popularly called the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, the amendment seeks to reserve 33 per cent of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Delhi Legislative Assembly. Importantly, the amendment also provides reservation for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) within the existing SC/ST reserved seats.

The legislation is viewed as a historic attempt to increase women's political participation in India, where female representation in legislatures has traditionally remained low despite women constituting nearly half the country's population.

The demand for women's reservation in legislatures has existed for decades. Although the Indian Constitution guarantees equality before the law under Articles 14 and 15, women have remained underrepresented in political institutions.

After independence, women leaders such as





Sarojini Naidu and Sucheta Kripalani advocated greater political participation for women. However, progress remained slow. The first major breakthrough came through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992–93), which introduced reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. These amendments reserved one-third of seats for women at the local governance level. Over time, several states increased this quota to 50 per cent.

The idea of reserving seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies emerged strongly during the 1990s. The Women's Reservation Bill was first introduced in Parliament in 1996, but repeated attempts failed because of political disagreements and disruptions in Parliament.

106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023

The amendment officially became the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023. It aims to guarantee women's representation in legislatures through constitutional reservation. The amendment inserts new constitutional provisions, including:

Article 330A: This article provides reservation for women in the Lok Sabha. It states that one-third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs shall be reserved for women belonging to those categories.

Article 332A: This article extends similar reservation to State Legislative Assemblies.

Article 334A: This article specifies that reservation shall continue for 15 years. The provisions will come into effect after delimitation following the next census. Seats reserved for women will rotate.

Article 239AA: Relating to the Delhi Legislative Assembly, the amendment provides reservation for women in the Delhi Legislative Assembly.

The major provisions of the amendment include:

- 1. Reservation of one-third seats for women in:**
 - Lok Sabha
 - State Legislative Assemblies
 - Delhi Legislative Assembly
- 2. Reservation for SC/ST women**
 - One-third of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes will be reserved for SC women.
 - One-third of seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes will be reserved for ST women.
- 3. Rotation of reserved seats**
 - Reserved constituencies for women will rotate after delimitation.

4. Time limit

- The reservation is initially valid for 15 years, though Parliament may extend it later.

5. Implementation after census and delimitation

- The reservation will come into effect only after a future census and delimitation exercise.

Reservation for SC/ST Women

One of the most important features of the amendment is the inclusion of reservation for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. India already reserves seats for SCs and STs in legislatures under Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution. The new amendment creates a sub-quota for women within these reserved categories.

As nearly as possible, one-third of the seats reserved for SCs shall be reserved for SC women. Similarly, one-third of the seats reserved for STs shall be reserved for ST women. This mechanism ensures that women from historically marginalized communities also receive representation in legislatures. The provision is significant because SC/ST women often face multiple layers of discrimination based on caste, tribe, gender, social status, and economic inequality. Therefore, the amendment attempts to create a more inclusive political structure.

Strengthening Gender Equality

Women constitute nearly half of India's population but remain underrepresented in legislative bodies. Female representation in the Lok Sabha has generally remained around 14–15 per cent, while representation in many State Assemblies is below 10 per cent. Reservation can help correct this imbalance by ensuring a minimum level of participation.

Empowerment of Marginalized Women

SC/ST women often experience social exclusion and limited political opportunities. Political reservation may help create new leadership among marginalized women and encourage participation in public life. The experience of Panchayati Raj institutions demonstrates that reservation can produce grassroots women leaders who later participate in larger political processes.

Breaking Patriarchal Barriers

Indian politics has traditionally been male-dominated. Women candidates frequently face obstacles such as lack of financial support, limited party tickets, social restrictions, and violence in politics. Reservation creates constitutional space for women and helps challenge patriarchal attitudes in political



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institutions.

Proxy Representation

In some cases, male family members may continue to exercise real political power behind elected women representatives, especially in rural areas. This phenomenon has sometimes been observed in local government institutions where women representatives act under the influence of husbands or relatives. However, studies also show that many women leaders gradually become independent decision-makers over time.

Conclusion

The Women's Reservation Amendment represents a historic milestone in India's democratic journey. By reserving one-third of seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies, the Constitution seeks to address the longstanding gender imbalance in political representation.

The inclusion of reservation for SC/ST women is especially important because it recognizes the intersection of caste, tribe, and gender discrimination. Through sub-quotas within SC/

ST reserved seats, the amendment attempts to ensure that marginalized women also gain political voice and leadership opportunities. At the same time, concerns regarding delayed implementation and seat rotation continue to generate political debate. The true success of the amendment will depend not only on constitutional provisions but also on effective implementation, political will, and social acceptance.

If implemented successfully, the Women's Reservation Amendment could reshape Indian politics by creating a more inclusive, representative, and gender-sensitive democracy. It has the potential to empower millions of women, especially those from disadvantaged communities, and strengthen the democratic foundations of the Indian Republic.

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Role of Women Saints in Social Reformation

Abhirami



Abhirami uncovers the overlooked voices of women saints in the Bhakti movement, highlighting figures like Akka Mahadevi, Mirabai, Soyarabai, Lal Ded, and others. Their devotion challenged caste and gender oppression, transforming Bhakti into a space of resistance, agency, and spiritual equality beyond patriarchal and social constraints.

The earliest evidence of the Bhakti movement can be spotted in the seventh century, with Alvars and Nayanars rising high in South India, specifically the Tamil Land. The Alvar and Nayanar saints, mostly belonging to the marginalised castes, rejected the differences of the castes and class and welcomed anyone and everyone, for they believed more in the act of devotion. Gradually, this Bhakti movement moved towards the northern parts of the country. The misery of caste was being pushed further by the Brahmins and Maulvis, who made the already oppressed people believe that the social and economic disparity they were facing was the result of their past life's actions and not the crooked caste system, which the former looked up to so as to keep themselves at the top of the system.

As a religious movement, Bhakti resonated deeply with people, offering spiritual comfort and the assurance that God was accessible to everyone. Saints actively campaigned to wake the masses and eliminate social evils. The Bhagavata mentions the Navadha Bhakti, the nine forms of devotion that would lead one



to salvation. Bhakti progresses from external acts of sravanam (hearing) and kirtanam (chanting) to smaranam (remembrance), service through padasevanam (serving feet), archanam (worship), and vandanam (prayer), culminating in a personal relationship of dasyam (servitude), sakhyam (friendship), and atmanivedanam (total surrender). The word 'bhakti' means devotion, participation, reverence, or adoration. The Bhakti movement was a product of a transitional society where several changes were taking place on the political, economic, and social front. So, amid this, there arises the question: what was the role of women in this movement?

It was only around AD 1160 that women writers entered the literary history of Kannada, through a movement which was one of the precursors of the Bhakti movement – Virashaivism. This movement accepted the fact that there is no difference in men and women in relation to the inner truth of their souls. Women were encouraged to follow this tradition, not just in theory but also in practice. It is not all rainbows and sunshine as it seems to be, though. When studying the literature of any society, the prominent texts and works to come up are those of the literary elites, and if one takes the timeline of before the Bhakti movement into consideration, then the elites were upper-class, upper caste men, marking the narrative of women close to none. No text can take into consideration the perspective of women unless it is written by women.

There was no one who was ready to listen to their voices. But the coming of Bhakti was different for men and women. While men could continue to give their attention towards pure devotion while still being married, women had to leave their marriages. The number of women sants who remained married is very few, and most of these are the ones whose husbands followed the same path of devotion. Women who rose from the various occupations and sections of society joined the movement – be it a prostitute like Sankavva, a seamstress like Kayakada Remmavva or a grain grinder like Kottanada Somava. From this group of Kannada vachana writers, Akka Mahadevi was the most famous; in fact, the leading figures of this movement, like Basavanna and Allama credited Akka in their own vachanas. Although, Akka Mahadevi's path to become this great saint was not easy. She had to go through many trials, the first being her marriage. Her acceptance of the struggle to maintain both a husband and the love and devotion for the supreme can be seen in her vachanas.

She writes, "A husband inside, a husband outside. One cannot have both, sister. One cannot have both a worldly and a supernatural one". Another aspect of femininity she went against was the concept of shame. All the pictures one finds of Akka are of her hair covering her naked body, which resulted from her abandoning clothing completely. For this, she was even questioned by the Sarana society whom she wanted to join for her future endeavours, to which she replied:

"If the fruit inside is not ripe,
the outer skin will not have its ripe colour;
If you see what causes sexual desire,
you might feel hurt:
Thinking so, I have hidden it.
Why grieve about that?"

'Chennamallikarjuna', 'the lord, who is as white as jasmine', is the ankita of Akka's vachanas, a word towards the end of a vachana by which the author can be recognised. This is similar even in Soyarabai, from Maharashtra, who ends her abhangs with the phrase 'wife of Chokhamela'.

Coming from one of the Scheduled Castes of Maharashtra, Soyarabai and her husband Chokhamela have faced the oppression of caste. She feels the stigma of impurity and writes:

"All say the body is unclean, but the soul is pure!

At the moment of birth everyone's body becomes impure,
there is no immaculate birth! ...
Impurity occurs not by touching the body;
pollution is in your heart
and mind says with conviction Choka's Mahari."

While some women like Soyarabai, had the fortune to get married to a husband who supported her devoutness, there were many who had to face the wrath of a tiring husband and troublesome in-laws who believed that women should stay restricted to the domestic sphere. One such woman saint was Lal Ded, who lived during the fourteenth century in Kashmir. Bhakti became a space for her to denounce her domestic hell, a place to vent her pent-up feelings of suffering from her married life. Her writings about the domestic abuse she faced made her listeners realise that Bhakti was not just a form of devotion and that the sants were not only religious preachers. At the end of the day, they talked about the real issues in society, trying to bring in social reforms in a society where everything was based on power that rested with just a few.

This same ideology was preached by Mirabai, who was another victim of the patriarchal



society. Her attitude towards marriage tallies with that of Akka Mahadevi, as she only offers to be married to her lord, wherein she takes a step ahead of sakhya. When she left her family, it was not just the marriage she left but also her status as a royal, upper caste woman that was thrown away. This explains how society finds new ways of oppression – if not the caste, then they have the gender to push around. Going contrary to this is the support Sant Toral gets from her lover, Jesal Toral, who again was a saint. Sant Toral is the better half of the famous Jesal Toral pair, known as the legendary lover, as well as the saint pair. Mirabai acknowledges how Raidas helped her with the “pill of knowledge” and embraced her agency. The magnificence of her devotion can be seen through these lines:

“Mira danced with ankle bells on her feet
People said Mira was mad
My mother in law said,
I had ruined the family reputation
Rana sent me a cup of poison and
Mira drank it laughing.”

Much credit should be bestowed upon these women sants who broke the chains of restrictions, but credit is also due to their agents of support as well. Another saint that worshipped her guru as much as she did her god was Sahajo Bai from Rajasthan. Her emotion for her guru comes through in the verse: “Ram tajoon pai Guru na visaaroon, Guru ke sam hari ko na nihaaroon”, which means that for once she might abandon her god but never her guru, Sant Charandas ji Mahaaraj.

Factors of womanhood that are taken as weak, for example, meekness and humility, are taken up by her as for her they show the true strength and bravery of a person. Ratanbai’s contribution shows how Bhakti took in people from different religions as she was a Muslim woman by religion and earned a living through her spinning wheel. In the times when women did not have any sense of financial independence, Ratanbai talks about how her occupation leads to the betterment of the livelihood of her family:

“One and all rejected us.
The spinning wheel was our saviour
To it we cling.
I paid off all my husband’s debts
And over and above
Tying coin after coin in the corner of my sari
I earned a whole rupee.”

Bhakti was a product of such an environment, where the downtrodden had no voice. Bhakti became that voice. For many women, devotion was not a supplement to domestic life but an

alternative to it. The very idea of casting off the notion of modesty and decency is striking too. This movement gave women who started as a passive follower, the agency and position to be an active leader and influencer. Many read them and got impacted at a deeper level. This effect not only opened the pathway towards devotion but also towards better understanding of what it takes to be a woman in times like these. The whole concept of impurity is questioned, especially through the lens of oppression in the sense of both caste and gender. By integrating these voices, everyone will be taking a small step towards setting the historical record straight, the same history that so swiftly glossed over the mere existence of women, their lives, sacrifices and sufferings.

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Sant Ravidas's Begumpura: जहाँ गम भी न हो, आंसू भी न हो

Sant Ravidas's Begumpura envisions a casteless society where dignity, equality, and freedom replace fear, hierarchy, and exploitation—an enduring subaltern utopia that critiques oppression and inspires movements for justice across centuries.

Divyashree

Why should the freedom to live without fear, humiliation, or exclusion be considered utopian? For most societies these conditions would appear to be the basic requirements of human dignity. Yet in fifteenth-century India, where caste hierarchy structured every aspect of social life, such conditions were unimaginable for large sections of the population. It is within this world that the Bhakti poet Sant Ravidas articulated his vision of Begumpura, the “city without sorrow.”

Sant Ravidas's hymn does not imagine extraordinary technological wonders or ideal political institutions. Instead, it imagines something far more radical, it imagines a society in which humiliation, coercion, and hierarchy no longer define everyday life. This essay argues that Begumpura represents a subaltern world in which dignity is treated not as a privilege granted by social order but as the baseline condition of human existence.

The concept of utopia is often associated with philosophical attempts to imagine ideal societies. The term itself was popularized by the English humanist Thomas More in

his book *Utopia* (1516), where he described an island society governed by communal property, regulated labour, and institutional order. Yet utopian thinking is not limited to Western philosophical traditions. Across different cultures, oppressed communities have imagined alternative social worlds that challenge dominant structures of power. The philosopher Ernst Bloch described such visions as “concrete utopias,” meaning utopian ideas that arise from real historical conditions and express the aspirations of marginalized communities. In this sense, Begumpura can be understood as a concrete utopia rooted in the social realities of caste oppression.

Sant Ravidas lived during the fifteenth century in Banaras and belonged to the chamar community, traditionally associated with leather work and considered “untouchable” within the Brahmanical caste hierarchy. In medieval Indian society, caste regulated nearly every aspect of life, including occupation, residence, access to resources, and participation in religious practices. Communities labelled as untouchable were subjected to severe social exclusion and



humiliation. It is within this context that Sant Ravidas articulated his vision of Begumpura. His poetry does not merely condemn caste discrimination; it imagines a completely different world in which caste hierarchy ceases to exist. Begumpura therefore emerges as both a critique of existing social conditions and a hopeful vision of liberation.

The idea of Begumpura appears most clearly in a hymn attributed to Sant Ravidas that is preserved in the Sikh scripture *Guru Granth Sahib*. In the hymn, Sant Ravidas describes a city where there is no sorrow, no anxiety, and no oppression. Residents of this city live without fear, economic exploitation, or social hierarchy. One of the most striking lines in the poem declares that in Begumpura “none are second or third; all are one.” This statement directly challenges the graded hierarchy of caste society, where individuals were ranked according to birth and assigned fixed social positions. By imagining a society in which such distinctions disappear, Sant Ravidas articulates a radical vision of equality.

They call it Begumpura, a place with no pain/
No taxes or cares, nor own property there/
No wrongdoing, worry, terror or torture/
Oh my brother, I've come to take it as my own/
My distant home, where everything is right/
That imperial kingdom is rich and secure
Where none are third or second — all are one
Its food and drink are famous, and those who live there,
Dwell in satisfaction and in wealth
They do this or that; they walk where they wish
They stroll through fabled places unchallenged.
Oh, says Sant Ravidas, a tanner now set free
Those who walk beside me, are my friends. (Trans. Hawley and Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Sants of India*, p. 32)

The poem constructs Begumpura through a series of negations. Rather than describing detailed institutions or laws, Sant Ravidas defines the ideal city by what it lacks: no taxes, no suffering, no hierarchy, and no restrictions on movement. Each of these absences corresponds to specific forms of oppression experienced in caste society. Untouchable communities often faced economic exploitation, social segregation, and restrictions on mobility. In Begumpura, these conditions are entirely absent. People can move freely, live without fear, and participate in social life without being constrained by caste identity. The utopia therefore functions as a reversal of the oppressive structures that shaped Sant Ravidas's world.

Another significant feature of the Begumpura hymn is the affirmation of dignity for marginalized identities. In the concluding


lines of the poem, Sant Ravidas identifies himself explicitly as a chamar, declaring himself a “tanner now set free.” This act of self-naming is deeply political. Within caste ideology, occupations associated with leatherwork were considered impure and stigmatized. By proudly claiming his identity within the utopian space of Begumpura, Sant Ravidas transforms what was historically a marker of humiliation into a symbol of dignity and liberation. The poem thus reimagines community not as a hierarchy based on birth but as a fellowship of equals.

Beyond its thematic vision, the language of the hymn itself carries political significance. A philological reading of the hymn, informed by Kaur and Wessler's (2022) analysis, reveals a careful linguistic architecture that carries political weight beyond its surface meaning. The poem is composed in *Sadhukkari*, it is the mixed language of the *Guru Granth*, spoken across North India by the sants and draws on both Sanskrit and Arabic vocabulary in ways that are politically deliberate.

The opening lines juxtapose two words for suffering: *dukh*, a central Sanskrit term in the Indian eschatological tradition referring to worldly sorrow, and *adohu* (anxiety). The presence of these familiar terms immediately grounds the poem in lived experience rather than abstract theology. More striking is the appearance, in the third verse, of the Arabic term *khaufu* (fear, from Arabic *khauf*). As Kaur and Wessler argue, the juxtaposition of *khaufu* and *dukh* an Arabic term alongside a Sanskrit one is politically significant: it signals that Begumpura is imagined as a critique of both Hindu and Muslim forms of kingship simultaneously (Kaur and Wessler, 2022). In the historical context of Sant Ravidas's Banaras, subjects experienced coercion under both Hindu feudal lords and Muslim Sultans; the poem's vocabulary refuses to exempt either tradition from its critique.

The term used for Begumpura as one's own homeland is *vatan*, an Arabic word for the region one perceives as emotionally one's own a term that would, in the twentieth century, undergo a semantic shift to mean 'nation.' Its modifier *khub* (excellent, beautiful) intensifies the emotional investment. Kaur and Wessler note that this makes Begumpura 'not just a metaphor for some state of liberation difficult to define, but in a rather concrete way' a perceptible and tangible reality (Kaur and Wessler, 2022). This is confirmed by the remarkable phrase *gah pai* I have found' in the fifth verse.

Begumpura is not described as a future aspiration alone; Sant Ravidas claims it as



already located, already present in some form. The term patishahi (divine kingdom) further underlines this: it invokes the title of the Mughal emperor only to transfer it to the divine and to Begumpura, implicitly exposing the worldly emperor as temporary and unjust by contrast (Kaur and Wessler, 2022).

Begumpura also reflects the broader intellectual context of the Bhakti movement, which emphasized devotion and spiritual equality over ritual hierarchy. Bhakti poets rejected the authority of Brahmanical orthodoxy and composed their works in vernacular languages accessible to ordinary people. Many sants associated with the movement came from marginalized communities and used poetry as a medium to critique social injustice. While the Bhakti tradition often focused on spiritual equality before the divine, Sant Ravidas extends this idea into the social realm. Begumpura is an ethical vision of a transformed society. The radical character of Begumpura becomes clearer when compared with More's Utopia. More's work describes a carefully organized society governed by institutional rules and administrative structures. Equality in More's utopia is achieved through regulated property relations and centralized governance. In contrast, Begumpura contains no elaborate institutional design. Instead, equality emerges through the absence of oppressive structures such as caste hierarchy and economic exploitation. While More imagines an ideal society through rational planning,

Sant Ravidas imagines a world defined by the elimination of domination. This distinction highlights the different social locations of the two thinkers. More wrote as an educated European statesman, whereas Sant Ravidas spoke from the perspective of a marginalized artisan community. Begumpura therefore represents what scholars often call a "subaltern utopia," a vision arising from the experiences of the oppressed rather than from elite philosophical speculation.

The influence of Sant Ravidas's vision extends beyond the medieval period and resonates within later anti-caste traditions. Scholars such as Gail Omvedt have argued that Begumpura represents one of the earliest articulations of egalitarian social imagination in India. The ideas expressed in the hymn anticipate the intellectual movements that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through figures like Jyotirao Phule and B. R. Ambedkar. Phule's critique of Brahmanical ideology and his advocacy for education among oppressed communities echo Sant Ravidas's insistence

on human dignity. Similarly, Ambedkar's call for the annihilation of caste reflects the same fundamental principle articulated in Begumpura: that social hierarchy must disappear entirely for equality to become possible.

The contemporary relevance of Begumpura remains significant. Despite legal guarantees of equality in modern India, caste-based discrimination continues to shape social and economic life. The vision articulated by Sant Ravidas therefore continues to function as a moral and political horizon for movements seeking social justice. Begumpura represents an enduring aspiration for a society grounded in equality and dignity.

Begumpura therefore stands not simply as devotional poetry but as a radical critique of the social order from which it emerged. By imagining a city without fear, taxation, coercion, or hierarchy, Sant Ravidas exposes the violence embedded in the everyday structures of caste society. Unlike elite utopian traditions that attempt to redesign political institutions, Begumpura imagines something more fundamental: the restoration of human dignity as the basic condition of social life.

The continued resonance of Sant Ravidas's vision, echoed later in the writings of thinkers such as Phule and Dr Ambedkar, reveals the enduring power of this demand. That the conditions Sant Ravidas described as utopian remain unrealized in many contexts today is an indictment of the world that continues to make such dignity appear extraordinary.

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Sant Ravidas's Democratisation of Spirituality

Sant Ravidas is a transformative thinker who democratized spirituality by challenging caste hierarchies, embracing Bhakti's inclusivity, and envisioning Begumpura as an egalitarian society. His teachings redefined dignity, devotion, and unity, leaving a lasting civilizational legacy of equality and cultural belonging.

Kirti

“A society survives not merely through power or institutions, but through the stories, songs, and spiritual visions that teach its people how to belong together.”

The history of Bharat has often been described through the language of kingdoms, dynasties, and political formations. Yet civilizations endure through deeper cultural processes: through ethical visions, shared symbols, devotional traditions, and ways of imagining collective life. Among the most significant voices in this civilizational history is Sant Ravidas, whose teachings articulated a profound relationship between equality, devotion, and cultural unity.

Ravidas emerged in fifteenth–sixteenth century North India at a moment marked by severe social stratification. Caste hierarchy governed not only occupation and status, but also dignity, spiritual legitimacy, and access to public life. Social fragmentation was embedded into the structure of society itself. In such a world, Ravidas's intervention was radical not simply because he criticized inequality, but because he identified hierarchy as fundamentally

incompatible with collective belonging.

Modern scholarship has frequently approached Ravidas either as a Bhakti saint or as a figure of anti-caste resistance. Both interpretations are important, but neither fully captures the civilizational dimension of his thought. Ravidas was not merely protesting exclusion; he was attempting to reconstruct the moral basis of society. His teachings offered a framework through which a deeply divided social order could imagine unity without erasing diversity.


Caste as Social Fragmentation

Ravidas understood caste not only as oppression, but as disintegration. One of his most celebrated verses expresses this insight with extraordinary precision:

“जाति में जाति है, जो केतन के पात, रैदास मनुष न जुड़ सके,
जब तक जाति न जाता।

“There are castes within castes, like the endless layers of a banana tree; humanity cannot unite until caste itself disappears.”

The metaphor is striking because it reveals caste as an endlessly reproductive system of



division. Society becomes fragmented into layers within layers, making genuine solidarity impossible. Ravidas, therefore, frames caste not merely as moral injustice, but as a structural obstacle to unity itself.

This distinction is important. Many social critiques condemn hierarchy because it produces suffering. Ravidas goes further: he argues that hierarchy destroys the possibility of collective cultural life. A society organized through inherited humiliation cannot produce meaningful belonging. His response was equally transformative. Ravidas rejected the idea that human worth could be determined by birth. Instead, he relocated dignity within ethical and spiritual conduct:

“रैदास ब्राह्मण मति पूजए, जो होवे गुणहीन, पूजए चरण चांडाल के, जो होवे गुण प्रवीण।”

“Do not worship a Brahmin devoid of virtue; instead, revere the feet of the Chandala rich in qualities.”

The radicalism of these lines lies in their complete inversion of social authority. Reverence no longer belongs automatically to ritual status or inherited privilege. Moral worth emerges from virtue. Ravidas was therefore not only criticizing caste; he was reorganizing the ethical logic of society itself. Human beings were to be valued through conduct rather than lineage, through inner quality rather than inherited rank. Such a redefinition created the conditions for a broader conception of social participation.

Equally significant was the medium through which Ravidas communicated these ideas. He spoke in vernacular idioms rather than elite scholastic language. His verses circulated through songs, oral traditions, and devotional gatherings among ordinary people. In doing so, anti-hierarchical thought entered cultural consciousness rather than remaining confined to philosophical discourse.

Bhakti and the Democratization of Spirituality

The Bhakti movement represented one of the most significant cultural transformations in premodern Bharat. Across regions and linguistic traditions, Bhakti challenged ritual exclusivity by emphasizing direct devotion, accessibility, and inward spirituality.

From Ramanuja in the South to Basavanna in Karnataka, from Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal to Guru Nanak in Punjab, Bhakti generated a devotional current that moved across the subcontinent. Though these traditions differed in theology and practice, they shared a common impulse: the democratization of spiritual life.

Within this wider movement, Ravidas articulated one of the most socially consequential voices. The importance of Bhakti lay not merely

in religious reform, but in its reorganization of sacred authority. By shifting away from Sanskrit exclusivity and embracing vernacular expression, Bhakti traditions transformed language itself into a cultural bridge. Sacred ideas once restricted to elite institutions now circulated among artisans, laborers, women, and marginalized communities.

This vernacularisation of spirituality had immense integrative consequences. It enabled individuals from different social locations to participate in a shared devotional culture without requiring uniformity of identity. Ravidas repeatedly emphasized the inward and universally accessible nature of devotion:

‘मन चंगा तो कौती में गंगा।’

“If the mind is pure, the Ganges flows even in a humble vessel.”

This simple statement contains a profound theological shift. Sacredness is detached from ritual privilege and relocated within ethical consciousness. The divine becomes accessible independent of caste status, institutional mediation, or social rank. Bhakti thus became more than a religious movement. It functioned as a cultural language through which diverse communities could imagine participation within a common moral world.

Its collective practices strengthened this process further. Singing, recitation, and oral transmission created spaces where inherited hierarchies could be questioned and, at times, temporarily dissolved. Equality was not merely argued; it was experienced through devotional participation. Ravidas’s contribution to this tradition was distinctive because his egalitarianism was foundational rather than incidental. In his thought, spirituality and social dignity could not be separated. The democratization of devotion necessarily implied the democratization of human worth.

Begumpura: The Imagination of an Egalitarian Society

If Ravidas dismantled hierarchy through critique, he also offered an alternative social imagination. That imagination appears most powerfully in his vision of Begumpura — the “city without sorrow.”

“बेगमपुरा शहर को नाव
दुःख अंदोह नहीं तिहि अंव
ना तसबीख खिराजु न माला
खीफु न खता न तरस ज्वाला।”

Begumpura is not merely mystical longing or devotional abstraction. It is a deeply political and civilizational imagination emerging from the experience of exclusion. The city Ravidas describes is free from fear, coercion, taxation, humiliation, and social domination. What makes the vision remarkable is that Ravidas does not



speak through philosophical terminology; he creates a socially intelligible world ordinary people can imagine inhabiting.

This imaginative dimension is central to his thought. Critique alone cannot transform society. Human communities also require images of alternative life through which equality becomes culturally conceivable.

Begumpura performs precisely this function. It provides a normative horizon against which hierarchical society appears morally inadequate. At the same time, Ravidas does not imagine unity through sameness. Begumpura does not erase plurality; it removes humiliation. The basis of social cohesion shifts from hierarchy to shared dignity.

This insight gives Begumpura enduring intellectual significance. Ravidas understood that unity imposed through domination ultimately remains unstable. Cultural cohesion requires structures of mutual recognition. Begumpura is therefore far more than utopian poetry. It is a social imagination of civilization itself — a vision of collective life organized through equality rather than inherited exclusion.

Devotional Circulation and Spiritual Universality

The historical movement of Ravidas's teachings across regions and religious traditions demonstrates the integrative power of his thought. His verses did not remain confined to a single caste community or local devotional network. They entered a broader civilizational circulation.

The inclusion of Ravidas's compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib remains among the clearest expressions of this universality. Compiled under Guru Arjan in the seventeenth century, the Sikh scripture brought together the hymns of Sikh Gurus alongside compositions of Bhakti and Sufi saints from different social backgrounds. Ravidas's presence within this canon carries immense significance. A saint born into a marginalized caste was granted enduring scriptural authority not because of hereditary status or institutional power, but because of the ethical and spiritual force of his words.

This inclusion reveals something fundamental about the cultural dynamics of Bharat. Spiritual traditions did not always evolve through isolation; they often entered into dialogue, absorbing and rearticulating ideas across boundaries while retaining distinct identities. Ravidas's incorporation into the Guru Granth Sahib therefore represents more than devotional appreciation. It demonstrates the capacity of his teachings to transcend sectarian limits and participate in a shared spiritual discourse.

A similarly powerful example appears in the traditional relationship between Ravidas and Meera Bai. That a Rajput princess accepted Ravidas as her guru represented a direct challenge to the logic of caste hierarchy. In a society structured through inherited status and ritual distance, Meera's discipleship carried enormous symbolic force. Spiritual authority was detached from social rank and relocated within devotion and insight.

More importantly, this relationship transformed Ravidas's egalitarianism from abstract principle into lived social practice. It demonstrated that Bhakti could reorder relationships themselves, not merely theological ideas.

Through such movements across caste, region, and religious tradition, Ravidas's teachings acquired a distinctly civilizational character. His message endured because it spoke simultaneously to devotion, dignity, and the human need for belonging.

Ravidas and the Cultural Idea of Unity

The enduring significance of Sant Ravidas lies in the fact that he locates the possibility of unity within culture rather than political authority alone. For Ravidas, no society fractured by humiliation and inherited inequality can sustain meaningful cohesion. His thought therefore operates simultaneously at multiple levels. It critiques caste as fragmentation. It democratizes spirituality through Bhakti. It transforms vernacular language into a medium of shared participation. It constructs an egalitarian social imagination through Begumpura. And it crosses religious boundaries through devotional circulation. Taken together, these dimensions reveal Ravidas not simply as a medieval Bhakti saint, but as a profound thinker of cultural integration within the civilizational context of Bharat.

His relevance extends beyond historical memory. Contemporary societies continue to struggle with questions of identity, exclusion, and collective belonging. Ravidas's teachings remind us that diversity by itself does not create unity. Shared civilization requires ethical structures through which individuals can participate with dignity.

This is perhaps the deepest insight within Ravidas's thought: unity cannot be imposed from above. It must emerge culturally — through shared imagination, mutual recognition, and the refusal to reduce human beings to inherited hierarchies. That remains the enduring power of his vision.

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Sant Ravidas's enduring influence on contemporary Punjab, tracing his egalitarian vision from Bhakti poetry to the rise of Ravidassia Dharm. It highlights caste struggles, Dalit assertion, and cultural expressions in music and identity, showing how Ravidas's voice continues to inspire dignity and resistance today.



Sant Ravidas's Influence on Contemporary Punjab

Sayuri

While talking about the Bhakti movement, perhaps India's most prominent religious movement, it's difficult not to discuss how it openly preached about personal devotion and challenged caste-based exclusivity. Spanning from the 7th to 17th centuries, it liberalized spirituality, making divine love accessible to regardless of social identity. Bhakti poets like Kabir, Mirabai and Tulsidas asserted that love and surrender were the only paths to salvation, challenging religious orthodoxy. While Tukaram rejected Brahmanical authority in Marathi abhangas, Guru Ravidas envisioned

a casteless society where divine grace was universal.

Born into the Chamar community in medieval India, Ravidas belonged to the untouchable strata and initially worked with leather before shifting to spiritual pursuits. He began spending more time with Sufi saints and ascetics, understanding the hypocrisy of the religion he was born into. Born in Sir Gobardhanpur near Varanasi, his birthplace is now Shri Guru Ravidas Janam Asthan. Believed to be disciple of Ramananda and contemporary of Kabir, Ravidas eventually transitioned from saguna to nirguna



bhakti, rejecting Hindu idolatry and challenging ideals of untouchability. For centuries, the Varna system categorized society into Brahmins, Vaishyas, Kshatriyas, and Shudras, with the "Avarna" or untouchables excluded from public space.

Ravidas emerged as a revolutionary activist against this unjust system. In the fifteenth century, Guru Ravidas appeared with a message of equality and fraternity. Since he did not write an autobiography, a lot of his works were documented by disciples later making the accounts prone to idolization and mythological. The most authentic records of his teachings are thus found in Sikh scriptures. The Adi Granth, compiled in 1604, contains 40 hymns and a couplet attributed to him. This inclusion integrated his nirguna teachings into the Sikh tradition, making his verses one of the oldest attested sources of his spiritual ideas.

His verses open debates on justice and spirituality. He describes Begampura which is his idea of a utopian society without suffering, taxes, or class. It's a stable, eternal kingdom where everyone is free. His hymns included natural metaphors, such as comparing the relationship between God and the soul to gold and a bracelet, asserting that Divine essence exists within everyone regardless of birth. By calling the body a "puppet of clay," he emphasized that the animating spirit is identical in both king and labourer.

The Sikh movement, originating from interactions between Hinduism and Islam, was a turning point in Punjab's history. The trio of Sangat, Pangat, and Langar translated equality into practice, removing caste-based distinctions. However, despite these efforts, caste prejudice within the religion persisted. The Sikh community became dominated by various Shudra castes, particularly the Jatts, who gained influence due to their numerical strength and control over agricultural land.

By the 18th century, Jatts secured a higher position not through ritual virtue, but through hegemony over land and Gurdwaras. Many Dalits had embraced Sikhism to escape exclusion but were still kept out of management committees. Consequently, social exclusion in Punjab became tied to the rural economy favouring land-owning castes over landless Dalits. Realizing that conversion had failed to improve their status, many Dalits sought salvation in establishing distinct religious spaces, leading to the Ravidassia movement.

Although Ravidassia Dharm formally established itself in 2010, it traces its roots back to the Ad Dharm movement of the 1920s.

This movement emerged as a reaction to the discrimination faced by Dalits within Sikhism. Sikhism, despite preaching about the principles of equality and casteless society, managed to bring in some form of discrimination.

The movement gained momentum through the upward mobility of the Chamar community, who found prosperity abroad and access to education. Led by figures like Mangu Ram Mugowalia, the movement depicted a narrative with Dalits as the original native rulers who were stripped of their heritage by "alien Aryans."

The movement encouraged Dalits to utilize their identity to contest in the dominant caste hegemony and establish an independent identity of their own. In 1972, the radical "Dalit" category was coined in Bombay, inspired by the Black Panther Party of the U.S.A, shifting the narrative from "oppressed" to "proud and defiant." This influenced the creation of Ravidassia Dharm as a manifestation of

In Punjab, mainstream musical genres like Sufi, classical, and folk were eventually dominated by upper-caste artists. Many attempted to take from Dalit communities without proper credit. Early famous singers from lower strata, like Lal Chand also known as Yamla Jatt, often used aliases to protect their identity. Amar Singh Chamkila, known as the "Elvis of Punjab," sang fearlessly about social evils but was assassinated in 1988 in a suspected "honour killing" for his outspoken nature and marriage to a woman of Jatt background.

reclaimed Dalit cultural heritage.

Other contemporary movements also contributed to Dalit empowerment. These include the Nirankari sect which was established by Baba Dayal and sought to restore original Sikh practices and supported Nirguna form of bhakti. The Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, aimed to modernize Hinduism by returning to the Vedas, rejecting polytheism and Brahminical dominance and gaining support from Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab region. Meanwhile, the Singh Sabha movement sought to restore Sikhism's pristine glory

following British annexation. It established the SGPC and Akali Dal, revitalizing Sikh communal consciousness and promoting the Gurmukhi script.

The philosophy of Ravidassia Dharm evolved by projecting Ravidas's radical image to carve a distinct identity of their own. The Ad Dharm movement used his pictures as emblems and his poetry as revolutionary text that inspired their own scriptures. Babu Mangu Ram approached Ravidassia centers like Dera Ballan to compile a separate sacred text, the Ad Prakash.

The Ad Dharm movement sought to establish a code of conduct for a full culmination of religious identity. This code of conduct urged the reading of these scriptures and sacred text and the use of the colour red to distinguish the community. Followers were encouraged to boycott books like the Manusmriti that justified untouchability. Over time, Ravidassia Deras started serving as socio-cultural sites of worship, gaining confidence, pride and self-respect among the socially excluded sections. This ideology attributes immense dignity to manual labor, becoming the cradle of the Ravidassia Dharm.

In popular culture, historically, Dalit art and music were always sidelined. In Punjab, mainstream musical genres like Sufi, classical, and folk were eventually dominated by upper-caste artists. Many attempted to take from Dalit communities without proper credit. Early famous singers from lower strata, like Lal Chand also known as Yamla Jatt, often used aliases to protect their identity. Amar Singh Chamkila,

known as the "Elvis of Punjab," sang fearlessly about social evils but was assassinated in 1988 in a suspected "honour killing" for his outspoken nature and marriage to a woman of Jatt background. Even successful non-Jatt singers like Hansraj Hans or Mika Singh have often operated under the shadow of Jatt identity, which continues to dominate the Punjabi music industry.

However, there is a recent rise in anti-caste songs of assertion. Characterized as "Chamar Pop," these tracks by artists like Ginni Mahi yearn for denied dignity and celebrate their Ravidassia identity. Visuals in these songs often depict a journey from downturn to prosperity, creating a counter-culture against dominant hegemony. In film, while devotional movies like Sant Ravidas Ki Amar Kahani exist, they remain largely outside the mainstream stardom of the multiplexes, finding life on YouTube and digital platforms.

Ravidas' influence is seen through various aspects in society even today. While certain aspects don't reflect the much anticipated positive side such as the caste based discrimination within a religion that preaches about equality, the reaction to this and the cycle of human nature to realize it's shortcomings and always strive for a better future is a great example of the determined voice of Ravidas that resonates with the masses then, now and forever.

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Journey of Buddhism in India

This article traces Buddhism’s journey in India—from its sixth-century BCE origins under Gautama Buddha, through Ashoka’s golden patronage, to its decline amid invasions and assimilation, and eventual revival led by Dr Ambedkar. It highlights Buddhism’s enduring relevance as a philosophy of compassion, equality, and social justice.

Diksha



Buddhism is one of the major world religions, that originated in the Indian subcontinent during the sixth century BCE through and because of the teachings of Gautama Buddha. It emerged within a bigger movement called Sramana, which challenged the ritualistic practices, sacrificial traditions, and rigid caste system of Vedic religion of that time. During this period of significant social and intellectual transformation, there was growing dissatisfaction among the people with Brahmanical orthodoxy, that led to the rise of various alternative philosophical systems that focus on ethical conduct and personal spiritual experience. Buddhism distinguished itself by offering a practical and accessible path to liberation from suffering, that was grounded in rational inquiry and moral discipline rather than rituals.

The life and teachings of the Buddha form the foundation of Buddhism. Buddha was born as Siddhartha Gautama into a royal family, he lived a protected life until he came across the realities of human suffering when he saw the forms of old age, sickness, and death. These experiences encouraged him to reject worldly pleasures and enter in on a spiritual journey to understand the nature of existence. After years of disciplined practices, he rejected extreme self-mortification and discovered the “Middle Path,” which is a balanced approach between luxury and austerity.

His enlightenment under the Bodhi tree marked a turning point, that lead to the formulation of the Four Noble Truths, which diagnose the problem of suffering (dukkha), identify its cause in desire, find the possibility of its ending, and give the Eightfold Path as



the means to achieve liberation. This emphasis on ethical living, mindfulness, and wisdom made Buddhism appealing to a wider section of society, particularly urban populations and merchants and traders.

The establishment of the Sangha, or monastic community, played a crucial role in the early rise and spread of Buddhism. Buddhism became more accessible to common people by organizing followers into a disciplined structure and using local languages such as Pali instead of Sanskrit. Its rejection of caste discrimination and emphasis on equality also contributed to its popularity. Over the time, Buddhism grew into a significant religious and intellectual movement, supported by various social groups and gradually expanding across different regions of the Indian subcontinent.

The golden period of Buddhism in India is most closely associated with the reign of Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE. The Kalinga War was a pivotal moment

The historical journey of Buddhism in India from its origin and flourishing to its decline and revival, shows its dynamic and adaptive nature. Buddhism's philosophical and ethical teachings continue to influence both Indian society and the wider world. The revival of Buddhism shows its enduring relevance, particularly when addressing issues of social justice and human dignity.

in Ashoka's life, after which he embraced Buddhism and renounced wars and other violent conquests. He adopted the policy of Dhamma, and promoted values such as non-violence, compassion, tolerance, etc. Through rock and pillar pronouncements, he promoted these principles throughout his empire, which made Buddhism not only a personal belief but also a great framework for administration and public life. His support to the cause led to the construction of stupas, monasteries, and pilgrimage sites, which became important centres of religious activity.

Ashoka's efforts also transformed Buddhism into a global religion. He sent missionary expeditions to regions such as Sri Lanka, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, which facilitated its

spread beyond India. This expansion continued under later rulers such as Kanishka, who supported the development of Mahayana Buddhism and contributed to its doctrinal and institutional growth. During this period, major centres of learning such as Nalanda University emerged, it attracted scholars from across Asia and establishing India as a focal point of Buddhist education and intellectual exchange. The flourishing of Buddhist art and architecture, including stupas, chaityas, and sculptures, further shows the cultural richness of this era.

Buddhism slowly started to decline in India between the seventh and twelfth centuries CE. This decline was not abrupt. It resulted from various factors. One of the primary reasons was the loss of royal patronage after the fall of major empires due to Muslim invasion. The next rulers increasingly favoured Brahmanical traditions, which regained prominence and influence. Economic changes also played a significant role; as trade networks weakened and urban centres declined, monasteries that depended on merchant donations struggled to sustain themselves.

Another important factor for the decline was the assimilation of Buddhist ideas into Hinduism. Concepts such as non-violence and meditation were incorporated into Hindu philosophy, and the Buddha himself was recognized as an incarnation of Vishnu in certain traditions. This process reduced the distinct identity of Buddhism and led to its gradual absorption into the dominant religious framework. Internal divisions within Buddhism further weakened its institutional strength.

The emergence of different sects, such as Theravada and Mahayana, led to doctrinal fragmentation and reduced unity. Additionally, the increasing complexity of rituals and philosophical teachings made Buddhism less accessible to the general population over time.

External factors such as Muslim invasions, also contributed to the decline of Buddhism. The destruction of major centres of learning such as Nalanda University disrupted the transmission of knowledge and weakened the institutional foundation of Buddhism in India. By the end of the medieval period, Buddhism had largely disappeared from most parts of India, even as it continued to thrive in other regions of Asia.

The revival of Buddhism in India during the 19th and 20th centuries represents a significant re-emergence of this tradition in its land of origin. This revival was influenced by both scholarly rediscovery and social reform movements. Archaeological excavations and



historical research brought renewed attention to important Buddhist sites such as Bodh Gaya, while translations of Buddhist texts made its teachings more widely accessible. Organizations such as the Mahabodhi Society, founded by Anagarika Dharmapala, played a crucial role in restoring Buddhist heritage and promoting its teachings.

The most significant figure in the modern revival of Buddhism was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who viewed Buddhism as a means of achieving social equality and justice. Rejecting the caste system, he embraced Buddhism and reinterpreted its teachings to address contemporary social issues. In 1956, he led a mass conversion movement in which hundreds of thousands of people adopted Buddhism, marking a turning point in its modern history. His work redefined Buddhism as a socially engaged philosophy rooted in principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The historical journey of Buddhism in India from its origin and flourishing to its decline and revival, shows its dynamic and adaptive nature. Buddhism's philosophical and ethical teachings continue to influence both Indian society and the wider world. The revival of Buddhism shows its enduring relevance, particularly when addressing issues of social justice and human

dignity. Ultimately, Buddhism's legacy lies in its universal message of compassion, moderation, and the pursuit of wisdom, which remains significant in contemporary times.

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In this article we can explore why Buddhism travels seamlessly across cultures, highlighting its universal principles of suffering, impermanence, karma, compassion, and the Middle Way. Rooted in shared human experience yet adaptable to diverse contexts, Buddhism endures as a flexible, inclusive path offering wisdom, resilience, and relevance across time and societies.

Why Buddhism Travelled Across World?

Urvee



Buddhism's journey across continents and centuries feels less like a rigid historical expansion and more like a quiet, persistent unfolding. What began with the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama in ancient India around the 5th century BCE gradually moved across regions as different as Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and eventually into modern Western societies. What makes this journey remarkable is not simply the distance it has travelled, but the way it has adapted across cultures without losing its philosophical core. This raises an important question: why does Buddhism travel so effectively? The answer lies in its universal principles. Unlike belief systems that are deeply rooted in specific cultural identities or rigid theological frameworks, Buddhism speaks directly to shared human experiences. It focuses on suffering, change, and the search for meaning in a way that feels immediate and personal.

Instead of demanding unquestioning faith,

it encourages understanding through reflection and experience. Because of this, Buddhism becomes less of a fixed religion and more of a flexible path, capable of taking different forms such as Zen, Tibetan Vajrayana, or even secular mindfulness, while still remaining grounded in the same essential ideas.

At the heart of Buddhism lies the 'Four Noble Truths', which provide a deeply human and accessible framework for understanding life. The first truth acknowledges that suffering (dukkha) or dissatisfaction is an unavoidable part of existence. This is not presented as something abstract or distant, but as something that every individual can recognise in their own life. Experiences such as loss, uncertainty, frustration, and emotional unrest are universal, and by beginning with this shared reality, Buddhism establishes an immediate connection across cultures. The second truth explains that suffering arises from craving (trushna) or attachment, from the human tendency to



hold on to things that are constantly changing. Whether it is relationships, success, identity, or even expectations, attachment creates a cycle of desire and disappointment. The third truth introduces the possibility that suffering can end, offering a sense of hope that is grounded rather than idealistic. The fourth truth outlines the way to achieve this through the 'Eightfold Path', which includes right understanding, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. What makes this framework so powerful is that it is not prescriptive in a rigid sense. It does not function as a set of commandments imposed from above, but as a guide that individuals can test, adapt, and incorporate into their own lives. This openness makes Buddhism feel approachable, and inclusive rather than restrictive.

Closely connected to these teachings is the idea of 'impermanence' (anicca), which further strengthens Buddhism's universal appeal. The recognition that everything is in a constant state of change may seem unsettling at first, but it also provides a sense of clarity. If everything changes, then suffering is not permanent, and neither are the conditions that create it. This understanding allows individuals to approach life with a sense of acceptance rather than resistance. It also explains why Buddhism itself is able to adapt so effectively across cultures. Because change is seen as natural and inevitable, the tradition does not resist transformation. Instead, it evolves in response to different social and cultural contexts. In Japan, this idea finds expression in Zen practices that emphasise simplicity and presence.

In Southeast Asia, it is reflected in meditation traditions that focus on observing the changing nature of thoughts and sensations. In contemporary Western contexts, it appears in mindfulness practices that encourage awareness of the present moment. Although the forms differ, the underlying principle remains consistent, demonstrating how a single idea can take on multiple expressions without losing its essence.

The concept of karma adds another layer to this universality by offering a way to understand human experience through 'cause and effect'. Rather than relying on divine judgement or predetermined fate, karma suggests that actions and intentions shape future outcomes. This creates a sense of personal responsibility that is not tied to any specific religious authority. It allows individuals to interpret their experiences in a way that feels logical and grounded. Because of this, Buddhism has been able to integrate into

different cultural systems without conflict. In China, it interacted with Confucian and Daoist philosophies, blending ethical and metaphysical ideas. In Tibet, it merged with indigenous traditions, creating unique ritual and symbolic practices. In Southeast Asia, it became deeply embedded in everyday life, influencing festivals, education, and social structures. Even in modern Western contexts, karma is often understood in psychological or ethical terms, showing how easily it can be reinterpreted while still retaining its core meaning. This flexibility allows Buddhism to remain relevant in diverse settings without requiring complete cultural transformation.

'Compassion' is another central principle that explains Buddhism's global resonance. The emphasis on kindness, empathy, and the reduction of suffering makes it both personally meaningful and socially significant. Practices such as loving-kindness meditation encourage individuals to extend care not only to themselves but also to others, fostering a sense of interconnectedness. This focus on compassion allows Buddhism to move across cultures in a way that feels constructive rather than intrusive. It does not seek to replace existing beliefs but to enhance human relationships and ethical awareness.

Historically, this has contributed to the peaceful spread of Buddhism through teaching, dialogue, and example rather than force. In Southeast Asia, monasteries functioned as centres of education and community life, shaping moral and social values. In more recent times, movements such as 'engaged Buddhism' have applied these principles to issues like war, inequality, and environmental crisis. The adaptability of compassion as a guiding value ensures that Buddhism remains relevant even as social conditions change.

The principle of the 'Middle Way' further reinforces this adaptability by promoting balance and moderation. By rejecting extremes, whether of indulgence or severe asceticism, it offers a practical approach to life that can fit into different cultural and social contexts. Individuals do not need to withdraw completely from the world in order to engage with Buddhist teachings. Instead, they are encouraged to find a balanced way of living that aligns with their circumstances. This makes Buddhism accessible to a wide range of people, from monastics to householders, across different societies. The Middle Way also reflects a broader openness within Buddhism, where multiple interpretations and practices can coexist. This lack of rigidity allows the



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tradition to evolve without losing coherence, creating space for diversity within a shared philosophical framework.

Another important aspect of Buddhism’s adaptability is its emphasis on personal experience and verification. Rather than asking individuals to accept teachings on authority alone, Buddhism encourages questioning and observation. This approach aligns closely with modern ways of thinking, where empirical understanding and personal insight are highly valued. It also allows Buddhism to remain relevant in contemporary contexts, where traditional forms of authority are often challenged.

The rise of mindfulness practices in the modern world reflects this shift, as techniques rooted in Buddhist meditation are increasingly used in secular settings such as education, healthcare, and psychology. Although these practices are sometimes detached from their original philosophical context, they still carry forward the core idea of self-awareness and mental discipline. This demonstrates how Buddhist principles can continue to evolve while maintaining their foundational relevance.

Ultimately, the global spread of Buddhism can be understood not simply as a historical process, but as the result of its ability to address fundamental aspects of human existence. Its teachings are grounded in experiences that are shared across cultures, such as suffering, change, and the search for meaning. At the same time, its flexible structure allows it to

adapt to different environments without losing its essence. This balance between universality and adaptability is what gives Buddhism its enduring strength. It does not impose a fixed identity but offers a framework that individuals and societies can interpret in their own ways. From ancient trade routes to modern digital platforms, its ideas continue to resonate because they provide practical tools for navigating life. In a world defined by constant change and uncertainty, this combination of philosophical depth and adaptability ensures that Buddhism remains not only relevant but deeply meaningful across time and space.

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Parvathy MP's article explores Theyyam, Kerala's ritual art form, as a resilient expression of identity and defiance against caste oppression. Rooted in subaltern traditions, Theyyam embodies spiritual possession, ecological consciousness, and communal memory, offering marginalized communities dignity, artistic liberation, and cultural continuity into the modern era.

Theyyam: Unique Form of Artistic Resilience

Parvathy MP

Kerala was no stranger to the caste system that was pervasive throughout the Indian subcontinent. The Brahmanical order or 'Jaati sambradayam' in Kerala consisted of these hierarchies - The Namboothiris / the dominant Brahmins, followed by the Kshatriya warrior class, then the Ambalavasis / those who maintain the temples, the Nair community of land-owning nobles, and then come those who were regarded as the 'lower-castes' or Avarnas. It was common for the Savarnas to perform unmitigated violence towards them, ban them from temples, and even disallow the women to cover their busts as a mark of their inferiority.

It was no until the 19th century that active movements began to rise up against this system, including some of the most influential leaders the soil had seen such as - Ayyankali, a staunch supporter of the Dalit community,

who raged against the system by encouraging education and women's rights by founding the 'Sadhu Jana Paripalaya Sangham' (SJPS) to aid his efforts. Sahodaran Ayyappan, was another leader who pioneered the 'Mishra Bhojanam' Movement where people from different castes dined together. He also founded his own journal Sahodaran, through which he proliferated his ideas of equality.

According to the 2011 Census, Scheduled Caste communities constitute about 9.1% of the total population of Kerala, with a literacy rate of 88.7%. Today, with its general sense of civic responsibility and social progress, Kerala is more aware and vocal about its own flaws. However, this does not exclude the fact that the notion of caste is still very implicit in the fabric of society when it comes to marriage, surnames, and the ever-so-present formation

of caste- based associations or ‘Samajams’.

What could capture the history, beliefs, and culture of a community better than its rituals? Theyyam, native to the Northern part of Kerala, is one such ritualistic art form that has kept the identity and the struggles of the Scheduled Community lifestyle alive till the 21st century. ‘Theyyam’, or ‘Theyyattam’, is believed to have been derived from ‘Deivam’ (God) and ‘Attam’ (dance). It is a form of spiritual appeasement of the Gods through dance, and it contains several forms, all distinct in their own way as they worship different Gods. Today, it is more prevalent in the Kannur and Kasargod regions of Kerala (which was historically known as ‘Kolathunaadu’). It is important to note that Theyyam is not a temple art form, rather, it has always been the treasure of the local community’s sacred groves or ‘Kaavu’.

Like most art forms, it was often performed at the behest of its patrons, who were from the upper-caste communities, at their homes, to seek blessings for their families. Theyyam integrated the tales of all those victims of caste oppression by depicting them as martyrs, and worshipping them as Gods. The origin of Theyyam can be traced back to the Sangam period, and to the times when ritualistic worship of nature gods was a common practice. For instance, worshipping serpent gods is a continued tradition till date - The Pulluvan community, ardent worshippers of Serpent Gods perform what is known as Pulluvan Paattu, a ritualistic musical form performed in serpent temples and groves. However, with the advent of religions, especially Hinduism, such tenets were also integrated into the culture of Theyyam.

It has traditionally been performed seasonally, that is, only during the Malayalam months of Thulam – Edavam (roughly, November – May). While Pujas and temple worship were always the prerogative of the Upper-caste Namboothiris, Theyyam and such art forms were always inherently meant for the Dalit communities and they were labelled as ‘Cherujanmaavakasham’ (right of those who had small lives).

Major performing castes include the Malayans (men of the hills) - originally mountain-dwellers, sorcerers, and midwives, Vannans - washers, stitchers, as well as herbal medicine-makers, Pulayans – agriculture workers in paddy fields or ‘Pulam’ who were an essential part of food production. Other performing castes include the Mannan, Velan, Mavilan, and so on. Theyyam is a multi-faceted art form that requires performers to be adept at singing,

dancing, make-up artistry, as well as proficiency in some instrument. Most performers spend their childhoods acquiring these skills naturally, and via training. Before every performance, they usually undergo a ‘Vratham’ (fast), resisting all desires of the physical world to purify themselves for the spirits to take over soon.

The performances begin with a ‘Thudangal’ (commencement) which is done with the beating of ‘Chenda’, a major percussion drum of Kerala. The performance is initially marked with the chanting of the ‘Thottam Paattu’ - an invocation song that praises the deity and prepares the scene before the divine possession. These thottams are distinct and orally-transmitted.

‘Mukhathezhuthu’ (literally, writing on the face), is when they paint their face, and wear the mask of the deity they are calling upon. It is after this phase that they don the Headdress which is often large and ornate. For some Theyyams in which the headpieces are particularly heavy, to navigate them with ease, the performers generally require a strong foundation in martial art, usually the ‘Kalaripayattu’.

‘Mukhadarshanam’ is that momentous phase when they look into a mirror and find themselves disappearing, letting the spirit take complete control over them, leading them to soon perform in a trance-like state. Some deities require the performers to handle tools or weapons while dancing as well. Soon, they bless the people standing around them. With the final act of ‘Mudiyedukkal’, which translates into ‘taking the crown away’, their headdress is taken off – representing the detachment of the deity / the spirit from the human body. It is believed that the performance ends here, with the artist coming back into his own.

There are several types of Theyyam, and each one venerates a different god and has a different story behind it. Pottan Theyyam, for instance, follows Sree Sankaracharya’s encounter with a man (believed to be Lord Shiva in disguise). The former urges the man to move out of his way in fear of being ‘polluted’ due to his status as a Chandalan, but the man retorts, raising several questions against this injustice. One of the most important lines from this narrative is:

“നീണ്ടകളളകൊത്ത്യൊലു ചൊരചളേ
ഓവ്വവർ?
നൊണ്ടകളളകൊത്ത്യൊലു ചൊരചളേ
ഓവ്വവർ?”

(“When you are wounded, is it not blood that bleeds out?”

When we are wounded, is it not blood that bleeds out?”)



Other important types include - Vishnumoorthi Theyyam, Muchilottu Bhagavathi Theyyam, Gulikan Theyyam, Kuttichathan Theyyam, Muthappan Theyyam, Kathivanoor Veeran Theyyam, etc. Devakkoothu is the only type performed by women, an exception to this male-dominated field.

What distinguishes Theyyam worship from the established traditions is how ecologically conscientious it is. Theyyam utilises natural colours for face-painting such as turmeric, charcoal, and rice paste. Materials are often created out of locally sourced materials such as wood, bamboo, coconut, and jute, representing its interconnectedness with nature. Theyyam represents the collective memory of these communities. These practices, which have lasted since time immemorial, worship certain archetypal entities which form the crux of their communal identity. It is, therefore, not just a ritual, but a psychologically rooted form of



expression that also, undoubtedly, has societal implications that challenge the status quo.

Theyyam disrupts the conventional systems of society and provides a platform for artistic liberation and relinquishment, which is otherwise a luxury to people from lower-caste communities. It is often seen as a prestigious symbol of the harmonious connection between the people of Kerala. However, a closer look would reveal the underlying threads of tension that persist even today. While some argue that Theyyam solidifies the dichotomy by being a caste occupation since only members of these particular communities are allowed to perform, others argue that it allows them to enjoy the respect that they deserve by asserting themselves in positions of power, albeit only for the duration of the performance. After the performance, they are inevitably downgraded by the established norms.

While they are bound to this form by the virtue of being born into their respective families, they cannot solely depend on Theyyam as a viable source of income since organizers tend to be quite miserly with remunerations.

In comparison to other established art forms, it is gleamingly apparent that Theyyam artists are extremely underpaid.

Presently, with tourism on the rise as one of the major economic and cultural pursuits of Kerala, Theyyam has come to the forefront of public attention, lauded as one of the oldest folk-art forms of the subcontinent. Theyyam has been able to adapt to present conditions and effortlessly integrate itself into the demands of the current world. It is easy to believe that Theyyam has survived due to its societal implications as a form that boasts the ideas of oneness and equality.

However, had it not been for the people and artists of these communities who held onto the mantle seriously, it is also true that the art form would not have lasted as it did. For them, the sheer creative satisfaction derived from the performances outweighs any obstacle in their way, making it a wonderful pursuit of identity, both self and communal.

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Priesthood: No more Monopoly of Caste

Author is a State President of the Samarasata Seva Foundation, Andhra Pradesh, is a committed voice for social harmony and temple inclusivity. He has spearheaded the construction of hundreds of temples in marginalized communities, advocating priesthood beyond caste barriers and fostering unity through devotion, equality, and progressive spiritual practices.

T. Vishnu

In our Indian society, for thousands of years, the individual who has commanded universal respect is not the Emperor, but the *Rishi* (Sage) or *Sannyasi* (Ascetic). In Western nations—which prioritize material comforts—it is the Emperor who occupies the highest position. When certain individuals or groups enjoy such high esteem and honor for hundreds or even thousands of years, it is only natural—a matter of human nature—for a sense of arrogance to develop among some of them.

Leaving aside the major temples, one must consider the actual income of priests in the vast majority of temples. Why do they continue in this profession? They serve as an act of devotion to God, not for the sake of income or social status. Certain forces, intent on dismantling the very fabric of Indian society, have actively sown seeds of hatred against temple priests. The impact of this malicious propaganda is felt by us all.

Priests exist across all castes even today.



The priests serving the village deities (*Grama Devatas*) are often women and individuals belonging to various non-Brahmin castes! A thousand years ago, the 'Samatamurthy' (Icon of Equality), Ramanuja, established the system of 'Mala Dasaris' and 'Madiga Dasaris' drawn from the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. In Kerala, Narayana Guru, and in the Telugu-speaking region, Sadguru Malayala Swamy, contributed significantly in this direction.

The Samarasata Seva Foundation (SSF)—established in 2015 with the blessings of *Dharmacharyas* (religious preceptors)—constructed 822 temples across SC, ST, and fisherfolk colonies in two phases, with financial assistance from the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD). In the construction of every single temple, people from all castes within those respective villages extended their full cooperation.

Adhering to the principle that "anyone, regardless of caste, may serve as a temple priest, the foundation appointed individuals from the SC, ST, and fisherfolk communities within those specific colonies as the temple priests. Training for all these individuals was provided by SVETA—an institution affiliated with the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams—under the guidance of local (upper-caste) Brahmin scholars.

At the sites of these newly constructed temples, the celestial wedding (Kalyanam) of

Lord Sri Venkateswara was celebrated with the participation of thousands of devotees. People from all castes participated in these festivities; devotees residing in the SC colonies prepared Prasadam (sacred food offerings) in their own homes, and people from all other castes reverently accepted this Prasadam directly from their hands. In many places, people from all castes now regularly visit these temples.

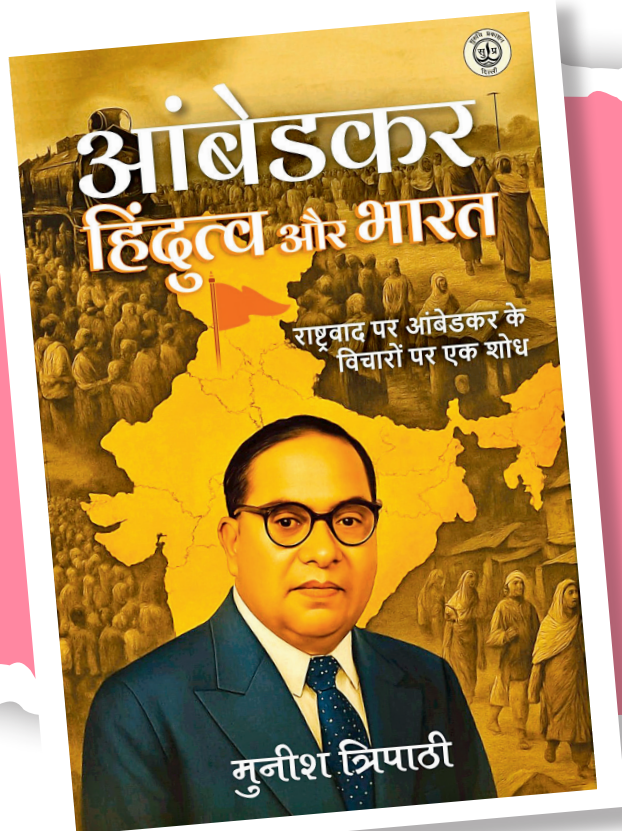
Furthermore, some of these priests are now officiating at weddings and other auspicious ceremonies. While the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, driven by such a progressive social outlook, is constructing temples on a large scale in colonies inhabited by marginalized sections of society, there are still some who raise hue and cry against it—individuals who seemingly wish for the very essence of Hinduism to vanish.

In the current social context, what changes are required in the practices and conduct of Brahmin priests? Everyone should read the book authored by Dr. Aravinda Rao (Retd. DGP). I invite you to visit and witness the temples constructed by the Samarasata Seva Foundation (SSF) across all districts of Andhra Pradesh. This transformation has been made possible through the blessings of numerous spiritual leaders.

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Book Review :

Ambedkar, Hindutva and Bharat



Munish Tripathi's *Ambedkar, Hindutva and Bharat* uncovers lesser-known dimensions of Dr B. R. Ambedkar's thought, beyond his role as Constitution-maker and Dalit reformer. Through eight deeply researched chapters, the book highlights his critiques of caste, communal politics, communism, and Article 370, while affirming his vision for unity, dignity, and national interest.

Munish Kumar

Usually, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar is known only as a Dalit reformer or as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. But he always used his intellect and abilities for the upliftment of society and the nation. Journalist, columnist, and writer Munish Tripathi's new book "Ambedkar, Hindutva and Bharat" reveals those aspects of Dr Ambedkar that are unfamiliar to the common people. In the present time, to preserve social and national unity, it is essential to know about his life and work.

The author has written this book with that perspective, as he discloses in his preface. The book contains a total of eight chapters and 145 pages. Reading it makes clear that the author has undertaken deep research. For this, he has relied primarily on Dr Ambedkar's comprehensive,

authentic, and primary literature. The facts presented may be surprising, but they are backed by irrefutable evidence.

The book explains that Dr Ambedkar had deep disagreements with the Congress and Gandhi. Gandhi was a strong supporter of the Hindu social order based on the varna system, while Dr Ambedkar considered the varna system to be the root cause of casteism. He accused the Congress of not making sincere efforts to eradicate untouchability. For this, he pointed out that when Swami Shradhanand was appointed by the Congress in 1922 as the convener of the Untouchability Removal Committee, he was given neither funds nor support, which forced him to resign in frustration. Dr Ambedkar was also a sharp critic of Muslim fundamentalism. He strongly



opposed the decision to include the Khilafat issue in the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Dr Ambedkar described the 1916 Lucknow Congress–Muslim League agreement and the Motilal Nehru Report, which was prepared after the Simon Commission, as anti-Dalit and anti-national because it opposed reserved seats for the Muslim community. The author cites Dr Ambedkar’s article “The Nehru Committee’s Plan and the Future of Hindustan” published in his newspaper Bahishkrit Bharat on January 19, 1929, where Dr Ambedkar wrote: “What use is a plan (Nehru Report) that harms the Hindus? We do not oppose this report merely because it infringes upon the rights of the untouchables, but because it poses a danger to the Hindus, and the whole of Hindustan may face trouble in the future because of it.” He expressed concern over the increasing number of Muslims in the Indian Army at that time, calling it a matter of national security. As a permanent solution to India’s communal problem, he even suggested an exchange of Hindu and Muslim populations.

In 1946, when the Muslim League joined India’s Interim Government, Dr Ambedkar described it as a government of two nations. The author notes that communists have long misinterpreted Babasaheb’s ideas, creating anti-national narratives and spreading confusion in the country. For communists, what Dr Ambedkar actually said and wrote is essential to understand for the sake of society and the nation.

He had stated: “Dalits should keep away from communists, should not participate in their strikes, and should not allow communists to become their exploiters, because this would harm the Dalits.”

In his speech “Buddha or Karl Marx” delivered on November 20, 1956 in Kathmandu, Nepal, Dr Ambedkar said that communists do not believe in religion, while living without religion is impossible for human beings. He argued that communists seek to establish a welfare state through violence and consider rule by force and bloody conflict legitimate. In contrast, he emphasized that the teachings of Buddhism—non-violence, equality, and self-discipline—provide a far more effective foundation for building a truly welfare-oriented state than the communist vision.

The author asks: “Even if only for a short time, how can liberation of the state by force and human killings be justified?” He then raises the question of what Babasaheb’s views were on the saffron flag, given that today allegations are made about the “saffronization” of government institutions.

In the chapter “Dr Ambedkar and the Saffron Flag”, the book recounts that when Dr Ambedkar visited Pune on May 21, 1932, his car was adorned with a saffron flag bearing the symbol “Om.” A similar incident occurred on July 3, 1947, in Mumbai, when he arrived at the airport and some members of the Hindu Mahasabha met him.

They requested, since he was a member of the Flag Committee, that he declare the saffron flag as India’s national flag. Dr Ambedkar assured them of his full support if such a proposal was introduced. However, due to lack of cooperation from other committee members, the proposal did not succeed.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was well aware of the importance of the Sanskrit language. In fact, he supported a proposal in the Constituent Assembly, moved by Bengal’s member Laxmikant Maitra on November 13, 1949, to make Sanskrit the official language. Dr Ambedkar himself had acquired proficiency in spoken Sanskrit, and he was even seen conversing with Laxmikant Maitra in Sanskrit inside the Assembly Hall. This was reported at the time by newspapers such as Leader, Dainik Aaj, Hindustan, and Herald, among others.

The author writes that communists spread confusion in society by propagating the myth of the Aryan invasion and migration theory, which fostered inferiority and hatred in the country—and to some extent, they succeeded in doing so. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, in his book “Who Were the Shudras”, demonstrated through the subjects described in the Vedas and anthropometry (ethnology) that the Aryans were natives of India and that the Shudras too were Aryans.

The book also sheds light on Dr Ambedkar’s perspective regarding Kashmir’s separatist Article 370. It highlights how visionary he was—Dr Ambedkar refused to draft Article 370. When Nehru asked Sheikh Abdullah to persuade Dr Ambedkar to write it, Dr Ambedkar gave a stern reply: “The Government of India will build roads in Kashmir, establish schools, and undertake other development works, yet granting Kashmir a special status separate from other states will not be in the national interest.”

Later, under Nehru’s pressure, Gopaldaswami Ayyangar reluctantly drafted Article 370. The author presents these diverse aspects of Dr Ambedkar’s life in a factual, research-based, and engaging style, making the narrative highly interesting.

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Bhumika: A Mirror to Merit Illusion

From childhood, I've constantly heard one question: "What's your social background?" I'd answer, but the person asking was intensely curious about my caste. I'd tell them hesitantly, thinking the questions would end there. Twenty years later, the same person, the same question—but with a different twist: "You don't seem like one of them..." I still don't understand what it means to "seem" SC or ST. These questions don't unsettle me anymore. But one thing is certain: in today's social setup, being SC-ST, benefiting from reservations around it, and then crafting a "merit" narrative has become fashionable. The rest of Indian society—knowingly or unknowingly—disdainfully dismisses the SC-ST community's merit.

A powerful Marathi play, *Bhumika*, responds to this merit narrative.

Written by Kshitij Patwardhan, *Bhumika* is a play directed by Chandrakant Kulkarni. Talented actor Sachin Khedekar stars in the lead role, delivering a nuanced performance that captures



both quiet dignity and simmering frustration as an upper-caste individual who is also a vocal supporter of reservation policies and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar within elite spaces. First staged in recent years, the play has resonated deeply in Maharashtra, drawing packed houses in Pune and Mumbai theatres. Its dialogues cut like a knife, exposing hypocrisies without preaching. One scene, for instance, shows a family dinner where casual barbs about "quota doctors" fly, mirroring real conversations in urban middle-class homes.

A generation has advanced by taking advantage of reservations. This generation struggled. They used reservations for education and built careers in the private sector. Unfortunately, even there, reservation beneficiaries face the merit narrative. The play captures the community's hustle—late-night studies, family sacrifices, and the constant proving ground. Importantly, it powerfully depicts exactly what discussions happen in so-called upper-caste homes about reservations: whispers of "unfair advantage" while ignoring centuries of exclusion.

Dr. Sukhadeo Thorat's research on caste discrimination in the private sector is eye-

opening. His studies, including those with the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, reveal that hiring biases persist: resumes with Dalit-associated surnames receive 25-30% fewer callbacks, even with identical qualifications. Jobs are given or denied based on surnames—this is society's harsh reality. Without reservations, one generation couldn't have even gotten an education; this isn't said in every household. Someone who studies in a government medical college, passes with excellent grades. But when starting private practice, they too face questions like, "You studied on reservation—how can we trust your quality?" Thorat's work also highlights how corporate India sidesteps affirmative action, unlike public sectors.

In my circle, countless doctors and professors have changed their surnames, trying to hide their identity. Their caste is revealed by surnames, reducing their acceptability—I've heard such bitter experiences firsthand. These stories aren't isolated; a 2023 NSSO survey showed SC-ST professionals in private firms earn 20-25% less than peers for similar roles, often due to "glass ceilings."

A friend in Bengaluru told me that many private companies reject candidates based on surnames due to fears of "atrocities" cases. It's hard for them to accept casteism exists in the private sector, but it does—more so there. Corruption is rampant too; no one talks about it. Recently, the Economic Times published an article stating: "The scale of what is being ignored is staggering. The India Business Corruption Survey 2024, drawing on over 18,000 responses from 9,000 businesses across 159 districts, found that 66% of businesses paid bribes in the previous 12 months. A majority said they were forced to. PwC's Global Economic Crime Survey 2024 found that 59% of Indian organisations experienced fraud in the past two years—18 percentage points above the global average—with corruption and bribery accounting for a third of all economic crimes. Applied conservatively to India's listed company universe, the annual private-sector corruption drag exceeds INR 1.5 lakh crore—roughly equivalent to India's entire defence capital acquisition budget of INR 1.49 lakh crore, and about 22% of India's total defence allocation of INR 6.81 lakh crore. This sum is extracted silently from the corporate sector without criminal prosecution." If corruption this massive flies under the radar, why expect accountability for subtler caste biases?

Casteism in the private sector is similar—it's there, discrimination happens, exploitation occurs. This is our society's reality. Someone needs to



speak up. In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, picking up a broom himself. Imagine the joy among unorganized sector workers, classified as Class IV sanitation staff—how can those who've never felt casteism's sting understand?

Even basic facilities like education and healthcare were denied to generations.

Bhumika conveys this message: how can success with all facilities compare to success born of struggle? The play doesn't stop there. It highlights the Dalit movement's failures too—internal divisions and complacency post-reservations. The inferiority complex toward SC-ST individuals in the private sector—"When you're fit to hold a broom, how did a tab end up in your hands?"—a character expresses this in hopeful dialogue. Another pivotal scene contrasts a Dalit engineer's innovative project dismissed as "quota luck" against a privileged colleague's mediocrity celebrated.

At one point, Sachin Khedekar appears on

stage in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's attire, and hands unwittingly fold in respect. Eyes well up. It effectively unravels the emotional world of caste hierarchy in an upper-middle-class family. There's no discussion on reservations in the private sector, but we must ensure casteism doesn't happen there, no one faces disdain. This won't come from laws alone—voluntary private quotas have failed—but from empathy, diversity training, and blind hiring. It will come from the feeling that we are all equal.

Inviting Dalits home for meals or festivals won't end casteism—this model is outdated. In globalization, such symbolic gestures mean nothing. What's more needed is to instil awareness of equal treatment in everyone—through school curricula, corporate workshops, and media like Bhumika. Inclusive, all-touching, all-encompassing—that's Bhumika's stance, urging us toward true equity.

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Dr Ambedkar Returns to LSE: Maharashtra Approves Landmark Academic Chair

The Maharashtra cabinet has approved the establishment of a Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Chair at the London School of Economics and Political Science to promote global research on social justice, constitutional democracy, economic equality and human rights.

The state government will provide around ₹37 crore for setting up the chair and introducing doctoral scholarships in Ambedkar's name. The initiative aims to support interdisciplinary research on subjects including constitutional studies, social equity, labour rights, inclusive governance and public policy.

Officials said the chair will organise lectures, seminars and academic programmes while encouraging collaboration between Indian and international researchers. An MoU will be signed between Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute and the LSE to implement the scholarship programme.

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

The Centre has disbursed over ₹7,981 crore in 2025–26 to support the education of more than 75 lakh Scheduled Caste students, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar said.

The minister said the government is implementing several welfare and scholarship

schemes aimed at the educational empowerment of marginalised communities. He added that spending on SC welfare schemes has continued to rise, including a 21% increase under the Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme for SC students and others.



NCSC Seeks Reply Over Excess Fees Charged From SC/ST MBBS Students

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) has issued notices to the DMER, Chennai, and the National Medical Commission over allegations that private self-financing medical colleges in Tamil Nadu collected excess fees from SC/ST students admitted under the NRI lapsed quota during 2023–24 and 2024–25.

The complaint alleged that colleges failed to implement the Fee Fixation Committee's recommendation of a 30% fee reduction and also collected additional charges of ₹1.5 lakh to ₹2 lakh under "other fees".

NCSC said it has sought details of students, fee structures and payments, adding that excess amounts, if collected, should be refunded.

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DIN VISHESH



Remembering Jhalkari Bai

4th June Jhalkari Bai Death Anniversary

Jhalkari Bai was a remarkable figure in India's freedom struggle, remembered for her courage and loyalty during the 1857 revolt. Born in 1830 in a humble family near Jhansi, she grew up with extraordinary bravery and resilience. From a young age, she displayed skills in horse riding and weapon handling, which later made her an invaluable part of Rani Lakshmbai's army.

Jhalkari Bai rose to prominence as a commander in the women's wing of the Jhansi army. Her most celebrated act of valor came during the siege of Jhansi by British forces. To protect Rani Lakshmbai, Jhalkari Bai disguised herself as the queen and led the army into battle. This daring move confused the British, buying precious time for Lakshmbai to escape and regroup. Her sacrifice and strategic brilliance turned her into a symbol of resistance and loyalty.

Beyond her battlefield heroics, Jhalkari Bai's life represents the strength and determination of women from marginalized communities who played crucial roles in India's freedom struggle. She challenged social hierarchies and proved that courage and patriotism were not bound by caste or gender. Today, she is celebrated as a folk heroine in Bundelkhand and across India, with her story inspiring plays, ballads, and commemorations.

Jhalkari Bai's legacy is not just about her military valor but also about her defiance of social norms and her unwavering commitment to the cause of independence. She stands as a testament to the fact that India's freedom was shaped by countless unsung heroes whose contributions deserve equal recognition in history.



22nd May

Raja Ra Mohan Roy
Birth Anniversary



28th May

V.D. Savarkar
Birth Anniversary



31st May

Ahilyabai Holkar
Birth Anniversary

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