

OTT REVOLUTION

Marginalised Move To Protagonists





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EDITORIAL

Equality Must Be Non-Negotiable, Social Cohesion Equally Sacred

The Madras High Court has delivered a message that should require no qualification - untouchability, in any form and in any circumstance, has no place in Indian society. Preventing a person belonging to a Scheduled Caste from entering a temple on caste grounds amounts to untouchability and violates the fundamental right guaranteed under Article 17 of the Constitution. The court has also made it clear that those responsible can face prosecution.

The case concerned the participation of members of the Milagu Kattan Adidraavidar community in the chariot festival of the Arulmigu Muthu Mariamman Temple in Salem. The immediate dispute was resolved after a peace committee meeting assured that everybody would be allowed to participate. But the court rightly went further. It made clear that temple entry and participation cannot be regulated by caste. The Tamil Nadu Temple Entry Authorisation Act, 1947, itself prohibits such discrimination.

There should be no ambiguity on the fundamental principle involved. Equality is not negotiable. Nor can untouchability be defended in the name of tradition, custom, local practice or religious sentiment. Article 17 represents one of the strongest moral commitments of the Constitution. It did not merely prohibit an objectionable social practice; it sought to remove from Indian public life an idea that treated one human being as inherently inferior to another.

That task, however, cannot be left to courts

and governments alone. It is a responsibility of society as a whole.

India has travelled a considerable distance from the social practices that once produced systematic exclusion. But the persistence of isolated incidents, wherever they occur, reminds us that social reform is a continuing process. The answer is not merely to punish after an incident occurs. The larger objective must be to create a social environment in which such exclusion becomes unthinkable.

At the same time, there is another responsibility that must not be overlooked. In a society as complex and socially diverse as India, every incident involving caste must be handled with care, facts and restraint. A minor misunderstanding, a local dispute over the conduct of a festival or a disagreement over customary rights should not automatically be converted into a sweeping accusation of caste oppression. Equally, a genuine instance of discrimination must never be dismissed as a mere misunderstanding.

The recent controversy over the alleged "purification" ritual at Haldwani illustrates why caution is necessary. The incident followed a political programme addressed by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge at the Ramlila Ground. Complaints were subsequently filed alleging that a ritual conducted at the venue amounted to an act of caste discrimination. The matter is now subject to investigation, including proceedings under laws dealing with caste-based offences. The Uttarakhand High Court, while declining to order a separate

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

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investigation, allowed the police process to proceed and recorded the State's assurance of a fair investigation.

Such cases demand neither denial nor instant judgment. If an act was genuinely motivated by caste prejudice, it must be condemned and dealt with according to law. But where facts are disputed, conclusions should follow investigation rather than precede it. This is not a concession to caste discrimination. It is respect for both justice and social peace.

There is an important distinction here. Condemning untouchability and being cautious about interpreting an incident are not contradictory positions. They are complementary responsibilities. The first protects equality; the second protects social cohesion.

India cannot afford a situation in which every local dispute becomes another occasion for communities to view one another with suspicion. Nor can it afford silence when discrimination actually occurs. Both extremes are damaging. One trivialises injustice; the other can deepen social divisions by converting every controversy into a confrontation between communities or castes.

The constitutional vision is far more constructive. Every citizen is equal in dignity and entitled to equal access to public and religious spaces subject to lawful regulations that do not discriminate on caste grounds.

The State must enforce this principle firmly. Community leaders must reinforce it. Religious institutions must ensure it. And ordinary citizens must recognise that social harmony cannot be built by humiliating another human being.

There is also a larger civilisational responsibility. Hindu society has historically produced powerful reform movements against caste discrimination and untouchability. The constitutional abolition of untouchability gave that moral struggle the force of law. The task today is to ensure that the principle becomes embedded not merely in statutes and court judgments but in social conduct.

Equality and unity are not competing values. They strengthen each other. A nation cannot become strong when any section of its people feels humiliated or excluded. At the same time, national unity cannot survive if every social disagreement is turned into an accusation that divides society permanently.

The lesson from the Madras High Court judgment should therefore be simple and unequivocal: there must be no place for untouchability. But the lesson for society is equally important: every incident must be approached responsibly, every allegation examined fairly and every genuine act of discrimination rejected firmly.

A strong India requires both. Equality gives citizenship its dignity; social cohesion gives the nation its strength.

Appeal for financial assistance

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

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Jogendra Nath Mandal's political journey remains one of the most striking paradoxes of Partition. A Scheduled Caste leader from Bengal, he sought liberation for his oppressed community through an alliance with the Muslim League, believing arithmetic could secure dignity and power. His rise as Pakistan's first Law and Labour Minister symbolised hope, but disillusionment soon followed. Mandal's resignation in 1950 revealed the collapse of an unnatural alliance and underscored a timeless lesson: numbers alone cannot guarantee justice or security.

Jogendra Nath Mandal: Unnatural Alliance That Collapsed

Satyajit



History sometimes delivers its most powerful political lessons not through victories, but through the wreckage of failed ideas. The life of Jogendra Nath Mandal is one such lesson.

A prominent leader of Bengal's Scheduled Castes, Mandal entered politics with a legitimate and urgent objective: to liberate his community from entrenched caste oppression and secure for it an independent political voice. He was not a passive follower of history. He negotiated, calculated, allied and took risks because he believed that the Scheduled Castes could not afford to remain politically dependent on others. But the political strategy he eventually chose became a tragedy.

Mandal believed that an alliance between the Scheduled Castes and the Muslim League could provide his community with greater political power and protection than it could obtain through Congress politics. He supported the League's political project, went to Pakistan at Partition and became Pakistan's first Law and Labour Minister.

Within a few years, the illusion collapsed. His resignation from the Pakistan government on 8 October 1950 was more than the resignation of a disappointed minister. It was the admission that a political experiment undertaken in the name of an oppressed community had failed. Mandal returned to India carrying with him one of the most consequential lessons in the history of Scheduled Caste politics: political alliances may provide power, but they cannot substitute for constitutional guarantees, institutional protection and political autonomy.

A leader shaped by caste oppression

Born in 1904 in Barisal, Mandal belonged to the Namasudra community, then classified among Bengal's depressed classes. His political consciousness emerged from the social reality of caste discrimination.

This is important because Mandal's subsequent political choices cannot be understood simply as a story of communal politics. At its core, his politics began with the question that confronted virtually every



Scheduled Caste leader of his generation: How could a deeply oppressed community acquire genuine political power rather than merely receive promises of reform?

Mandal entered the Bengal legislature in 1937 as an independent candidate. He wanted Scheduled Caste representation to be politically meaningful and not merely an appendage of larger political organisations.

He also developed a close political association with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Mandal's importance in Bengal politics extended beyond his own constituency. In 1946, he played a significant role in helping Dr. Ambedkar secure election to the Constituent Assembly from Bengal. The irony would become immense.

Mandal helped bring Dr. Ambedkar into the constitutional process that eventually produced the Indian Constitution. Yet Mandal himself chose a very different political path.

The attraction of political arithmetic

The attraction of the Muslim League was not difficult to understand in the political circumstances of Bengal.

Mandal believed that Congress did not adequately represent Scheduled Caste interests. The Muslim League, meanwhile, needed allies among Bengal's non-Muslim communities and recognised the numerical and political importance of the Scheduled Castes.

A political calculation emerged: Muslims and Scheduled Castes could become a counterweight to Congress and to the dominance of socially powerful sections among Bengali Hindus.

For Mandal, this was not merely an abstract alliance. He sought concrete benefits for Scheduled Castes—representation in government, educational opportunities and a greater share in political power.

In 1943, he helped bring Scheduled Caste legislators into cooperation with the Muslim League ministry headed by Khwaja Nazimuddin. After the 1946 elections, when H.S. Suhrawardy formed the League ministry and Mandal became its only Scheduled Caste member.

The arrangement appeared to vindicate his strategy. But politics has a dangerous habit of rewarding calculations before revealing their costs. The warning signs Mandal chose to ignore. The tragedy becomes sharper when one considers that Mandal was not unaware of the dangers surrounding his political choice.

The Direct Action Day violence in Calcutta in August 1946 produced horrific communal bloodshed. The violence in Noakhali and adjoining areas followed soon afterwards.

Scheduled Castes were not outside the

violence. They too were caught in the upheaval.

Mandal personally travelled through affected areas. He saw the consequences of communal violence. Yet he continued his cooperation with the Muslim League. That is perhaps the most tragic part of his story.

In his resignation letter, Mandal acknowledged the terrible suffering of Hindus but explained that he had nevertheless continued his policy of cooperation with the League. His political theory had already encountered reality; he simply did not yet accept the verdict.

This is what makes Mandal more interesting—and more tragic—than a mere political opportunist. He was a leader pursuing what he believed was the best available route for his community. His mistake was not that he wanted power for the Scheduled Castes. His mistake was believing that political arithmetic alone could guarantee their future.

The great gamble: choosing Pakistan

At Partition, Mandal chose Pakistan. The decision was extraordinary. A Hindu leader from a Scheduled Caste community was placing his political future in a Muslim-majority state that had been created on the basis of a separate political identity.

Mandal nevertheless believed that Pakistan could provide Scheduled Castes with political opportunities that the existing social order in India had denied them.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah recognised Mandal's usefulness and political standing. After Pakistan was created, Mandal became its first Law and Labour Minister. For a brief moment, the symbolism seemed powerful.

A leader from a historically oppressed Hindu community had reached one of the highest offices in a newly created state. But symbolism is not security.

Ministerial office could not protect an entire community if the underlying political and institutional arrangements did not guarantee equal citizenship.

When the political theory met reality

After Jinnah's death in September 1948, Pakistan's political direction increasingly raised questions about the place of non-Muslim citizens in the new state.

The Objectives Resolution of March 1949 further intensified the debate over the relationship between religion and the state. For Mandal, the question was no longer theoretical.

His resignation letter of 8 October 1950 recorded his growing frustration with the treatment of Hindus and Scheduled Castes, particularly in East Bengal. He described



allegations of killings, forced conversions, abductions, attacks on women, destruction of property and discriminatory treatment in administration and policing.

These were Mandal's own observations and allegations, made by a senior minister resigning from the government he had helped join. They therefore form the essential historical evidence for understanding his disillusionment.

His language was devastating. He wrote of the failure of his lifelong mission to uplift the backward Hindu masses of East Bengal and concluded that the future of Hindus there had become darkened by the prospect of conversion or liquidation.

He also described East Bengal as being treated like a colony of the western part of Pakistan.

Eventually, Mandal could no longer defend publicly what he had privately come to regard as indefensible. He resigned.

The man who had entered Pakistan believing that political partnership could secure justice for the Scheduled Castes was forced to concede that his experiment had failed.

Dr. Ambedkar and Mandal: two answers to the same question

The contrast between Dr. Ambedkar and Mandal should not be reduced to the simplistic

claim that one was always right and the other always wrong. Both understood the fundamental problem: the Scheduled Castes needed political power, dignity and protection from social oppression. Their answers, however, increasingly diverged.

Dr. Ambedkar placed his faith in constitutional safeguards, institutional democracy, individual rights and the transformation of social relations through law and political representation. He understood that Scheduled Caste emancipation could not depend upon the goodwill of another political community. Mandal chose political alliance and arithmetic. That distinction is crucial.

The Scheduled Castes constitute a social and political category with interests of their own. Their emancipation cannot safely depend upon becoming the permanent junior partner of another community. This was the central weakness of Mandal's political gamble.

An alliance may win elections. It may produce ministries. It may create temporary bargaining power. But unless the alliance is anchored in a common constitutional framework protecting individuals regardless of community, the weaker partner can eventually discover that it possesses political office without political security. Mandal's experience



demonstrated that distinction with painful clarity. The tragedy of representation without security. There is another lesson embedded in Mandal's story. Representation is not the same thing as protection.

Mandal was not an outsider in Pakistan. He was its Law Minister. Yet his position could not prevent the deterioration of the circumstances he believed threatened Hindus and Scheduled Castes in East Bengal.

This is why the constitutional question matters so deeply to Scheduled Caste politics.

For historically oppressed communities, the objective cannot merely be representation in government. It must be representation within institutions that recognise equality, protect rights and provide remedies when power is abused.

A minister can be removed.

An alliance can collapse.

A political promise can be withdrawn.

A constitutional right, backed by independent institutions, is fundamentally different. That is the distinction Mandal's tragedy brings into sharp focus.

What Mandal ultimately discovered

Mandal returned to India after his resignation. His political career never recovered its earlier significance. He lived through the consequences of Partition and the displacement of Bengali populations before dying in West Bengal in 1968.

Pakistan itself would eventually undergo another historic rupture when East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971. But Mandal's larger political significance lies elsewhere.

He represents the tragedy of a leader who correctly identified the oppression of his community but misjudged the political structure through which that oppression could be overcome. His ambition was legitimate. His demand for a Scheduled Caste political agency was legitimate. His desire to escape dependence upon dominant political forces was legitimate.

The failure lay in the assumption that another political alliance could provide the permanent security that only institutions and constitutional guarantees could provide.

That is why Mandal should neither be dismissed as a political fool nor romanticised as a visionary. He was a serious political leader who made a consequential gamble—and ultimately had the courage to admit that the gamble had failed.

The Mandal Lesson: Never Mistake Arithmetic for Strategy

Mandal's tragedy leaves behind a lesson

far larger than the history of Partition. Political arithmetic can create power. But arithmetic alone cannot sustain power. Numbers can bring two groups together for an election. They can defeat a common opponent. They can produce a ministry, a parliamentary majority or a temporary political bargain. But numbers do not automatically create a shared political vision. An alliance built merely on arithmetic can become unstable when its partners discover that their long-term interests, political objectives and understanding of power are fundamentally different. That is the danger of an unnatural political alliance.

Mandal believed that the Scheduled Castes could acquire greater political strength by aligning themselves with the Muslim League. The calculation had an immediate logic: two politically marginalised groups could combine their numbers and challenge the established political order. But political life is not mathematics alone.

Two communities may share a temporary political interest without sharing a common political destination. Mandal discovered this only after placing an extraordinary amount of faith in the alliance. By the time he recognised the contradiction, he was not merely an ordinary political worker. He was a minister in the state whose political project he had supported.

The lesson for Scheduled Caste politics is therefore uncompromising: never depend upon political arithmetic as a substitute for political judgment.

An oppressed community must choose its political friends with extraordinary care. Every alliance must be subjected to strict scrutiny. Mandal's tragedy was not that he sought political power for the Scheduled Castes. He was right to seek it. His tragedy was that he placed too much faith in an alliance whose political foundations were not in the larger interests and were restricted to a religion.

That is the distinction between winning power and securing a future. Mandal's life therefore deserves to be read not merely as the story of a leader who made a wrong choice. It should be read as a warning against a recurring temptation in democratic politics: the temptation to believe that numbers automatically produce security. They do not. Political arithmetic can create power; it cannot guarantee its durability. Political friends must be chosen after scrutiny, not merely counted before an election. That may be the most enduring lesson of Jogendra Nath Mandal.

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Over the past decade, India's entertainment landscape has undergone a profound transformation, driven by the rise of Over the Top (OTT) platforms. What began as a technological shift in how audiences access content has evolved into a cultural revolution that is reshaping narratives, identities, and representation. OTT platforms have democratized storytelling, breaking free from the constraints of traditional cinema and television. They have opened doors for diverse voices, regional languages, and unconventional themes that were once sidelined by commercial formulas.

OTT Rewrites Image Of The Marginalised

Sapna Deepak

One of the most striking outcomes of this evolution is the changing portrayal of marginalized communities. For decades, these groups were depicted primarily as victims—symbols of poverty, oppression, or social injustice. Today, through the lens of OTT storytelling, they are increasingly emerging as protagonists, decision makers, and agents of change. Series such as *Paatal Lok*, *Dahaad*, *Kathal*, and *Maharani* have redefined the narrative space, presenting characters from marginalized backgrounds as complex individuals with ambition, authority, and moral depth.

This shift marks more than a change in representation—it signals a broader cultural awakening. OTT has not only expanded access to stories but also transformed who gets to tell them and how. It is, in many ways, rewriting the

social script of Indian entertainment.

The Rise of OTT in India and the Changing Media Landscape

The way Indians consume stories has changed dramatically over the last two decades. Earlier, Indian audiences largely depended on cinema halls and television for entertainment. But today a smartphone and an internet connection can bring hundreds of stories directly to the viewer. This transformation has been driven largely by Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms, which deliver films, web series and other video content through the internet without requiring traditional television or cinema distribution.

The journey of OTT in India began before the arrival of global giants such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Reliance Entertainment launched BIGFlix in 2008, widely recognised as India's first major independent OTT/movie-on-demand platform. In 2010, Digivive introduced nexGTV, an early Indian OTT mobile application offering both live television and on-demand content. The market gained greater momentum around 2013 with the emergence of services such as SonyLIV and DittoTV. Hotstar followed in 2015, while Netflix and Amazon Prime Video entered the Indian market in 2016, significantly accelerating the growth and competition in the streaming sector.

The real transformation, however, came from the combination of affordable smartphones, cheaper internet connectivity, increasing regional-language content and changing viewing habits. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transition.



According to Ormax Media, India's OTT audience universe reached 547.3 million in 2024, representing 38% of the country's population. Its 2025 report estimated the audience at 601.2 million. The growth has increasingly extended beyond metropolitan audiences into smaller towns and rural India. This expansion has changed not only where people watch stories, but also which stories can be told.

Traditional television and mainstream cinema have often depended on established formulas, commercial expectations and familiar character types. OTT, by contrast, has created additional space for stories dealing with uncomfortable social realities, regional identities, caste, class, gender, sexuality, poverty, crime and social exclusion. This new space is particularly significant for communities that have historically remained at the margins of mainstream representation.

For decades, people from marginalised communities were often visible on screen primarily through poverty, social discrimination, crime, domestic servitude or victimhood. They were frequently characters in someone else's story rather than the people whose stories were being told. OTT has begun to challenge this pattern. The transformation is not simply about greater visibility but it is about the changing image and role of marginalised people within the narrative itself.

From Victims to Protagonists: The Changing Image of Marginalised Communities

One of the earliest and most visible stages of this change is the representation of marginalised people as victims of social structures. Paatal Lok, released in 2020, provides an important example. The series explores a world shaped by caste, religion, class, poverty and social exclusion. Its marginalised characters are often exposed to violence and structural injustice. The series asks viewers to look beyond individual crime and consider the social conditions that produce vulnerability.

Similarly, Aashram portrays socially and economically vulnerable people caught in a network of religious, political and criminal power. Characters such as Pammi become victims of exploitation because of their social and economic vulnerability. These stories are important because they make marginalisation visible. But visibility alone does not necessarily change the image of a community. The more significant transformation occurs when the victim begins to acquire agency.

This can be seen in one of the parts of the anthology Ajeeb Daastaans. Bharti Mandal, a Dalit woman, faces the combined pressures of caste and gender inequality. Yet she is not reduced to a passive victim. She questions the social hierarchy

around her and asserts her identity and dignity. The narrative therefore begins to move from: "What has been done to the marginalized?" towards: "What can the marginalised do in response?"

This shift becomes even more visible in *Dahaad*. Sonakshi Sinha plays Anjali Bhaati, a Dalit woman police officer investigating the disappearance of several women. The women in the story are victims of a serial killer, but Anjali occupies a completely different position. She is not merely someone affected by violence; she is the person investigating it. This is a significant change in representation.

A Dalit woman is shown not simply as someone experiencing discrimination but as a professional, investigator, decision-maker and holder of institutional authority.

Kathal: A Jackfruit Mystery takes a similar idea and presents it through satire. Sanya Malhotra plays Mahima Basor, a young police officer investigating the disappearance of two expensive jackfruits from the house of a powerful politician. The absurdity of the situation gradually reveals a serious social reality: the system can mobilise its entire machinery for the property of a powerful person while the disappearance of a poor young woman may receive far less attention. Mahima's investigation therefore becomes more than a search for missing jackfruits. It becomes a subtle examination of power, privilege, class and social inequality. Most importantly, Mahima is not simply the person suffering from inequality. She is the person investigating and challenging it.

If *Dahaad* and *Kathal* place marginalised women inside an institution of law enforcement, *Maharani* takes the transformation even further by placing a marginalised woman at the centre of political power.

Rani Bharti's journey—from an ordinary rural woman to the Chief Minister—challenges the traditional image of political authority. She is not merely represented as someone affected by social inequality; she becomes someone who exercises political power and makes decisions.

The 2026 series *Raakh* adds another dimension to this changing representation. Set in 1978 Delhi, the investigative crime drama features Ali Fazal as Sub-Inspector Jayprakash Jatav, a Dalit police officer. His marginalised identity exists alongside his professional identity and institutional authority.

Here, the marginalised character is not outside the state institution looking in. He is inside the institution and exercising authority. It is another interesting development is the emergence of the morally complex marginalised protagonist.

In *Serious Men*, Ayyan Mani is a Dalit man



who is intelligent, ambitious and determined to overcome social limitations. Yet he is not presented as a perfect or ideal hero. His methods and decisions are morally complicated. This is an important development because meaningful representation should not require marginalised characters to be either helpless victims or flawless heroes.

However, it would be too simplistic to claim that OTT has completely transformed the image of marginalised communities. Greater visibility does not automatically mean better representation. A community can become highly visible while still being repeatedly associated with poverty, violence, crime or helplessness. Similarly, token representation can create the appearance of inclusion without genuinely giving marginalised voices narrative control.

Therefore, the real question is not merely whether marginalised communities are visible on OTT, but how they are being represented. Are they only victims, or do they make decisions? Are they supporting characters, or are they at the centre of the narrative? Do they have their own voice? Do they possess professional, social or political authority? Are they represented only through caste, poverty or discrimination, or are they allowed to exist as complete human beings with ambitions, weaknesses and contradictions?

The answer to these questions suggests that Indian OTT storytelling is undergoing an important transition. The marginalised person is increasingly moving from the edge of the frame to the centre of the story.

This may ultimately be the most important contribution of OTT to contemporary Indian storytelling. It has created space for people who were historically represented through someone else's perspective to become the protagonists of their own narratives.

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Centre's Stand on SC/ST Creamy Layer

Creamy Layer for SCs and STs: A Constitutional Crossroads

Vijendra



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's conception of reservations was rooted not in economic relief but in dismantling centuries of entrenched caste oppression. During the Constituent Assembly Debates of 1949, he emphasized that caste was a social institution governing access to dignity, rights, and opportunity. Poverty, he argued, was only one dimension of exclusion; the deeper injustice lay in systemic denial of representation and participation. Reservations were thus designed as a constitutional safeguard, ensuring that historically marginalized communities could claim space in education, employment, and governance.

The debate over extending the “creamy layer” principle to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) has once again reached the Supreme Court, where the Government of India has firmly stated that such a decision lies within the exclusive domain of Parliament. This position underscores the delicate balance between judicial interpretation and legislative authority in shaping India's reservation policies, and it brings into focus the larger question of how affirmative action should evolve in a society grappling with both historical injustice and contemporary social mobility.

Petitioners before the Court have argued for a merit-cum-means approach. They believe that income-based preferences within SC, ST, OBC, and EWS categories, coupled with sub-classification to prioritize economically weaker candidates, would ensure a fairer distribution of reservation benefits. Their contention is that without such filters, the most disadvantaged within SC/ST communities remain excluded from opportunities, while relatively privileged families continue to benefit disproportionately. This demand reflects a growing concern that affirmative action, in its current form, risks being monopolized by elites within marginalized groups.

To understand the roots of the current debate, one must revisit the historical foundations of reservation in India. The idea of



affirmative action was not conceived merely as an economic remedy but as a radical social intervention. During the Constituent Assembly Debates in 1949, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar made it clear that caste was not simply a matter of poverty or material deprivation. It was, in his words, a deeply entrenched social institution that had governed access to dignity, opportunity, and rights for centuries. Ambedkar argued that reservations were designed to dismantle this oppressive structure, to provide representation and justice to communities historically excluded from education, employment, and political participation. They were never meant to be a temporary welfare measure but a constitutional safeguard against systemic discrimination.

This principle was codified in the Presidential Order of 1950, which initially restricted Scheduled Caste status to Hindus. The logic was that caste oppression was embedded within Hindu social structures. In 1956, the status was

extended to Sikhs, and in 1990 to Buddhists, reflecting the recognition that caste hierarchies persisted in these traditions as well. However, Christians and Muslims were excluded, on the rationale that caste was not an organizing principle in Abrahamic faiths. This decision itself has been the subject of long-standing debate, as Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims continue to argue that social exclusion does not vanish with conversion. The exclusion illustrates how reservation policy has always been contested terrain, shaped by both social realities and constitutional philosophy.

The creamy layer principle emerged much later, in the landmark *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* judgment of 1992. This case, which examined the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, introduced income-based exclusion for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The Court reasoned that relatively affluent and socially advanced individuals within



Dr. Ambedkar rejected the idea of reservations as a temporary welfare measure. Instead, he envisioned them as instruments of social transformation, enabling oppressed groups to break free from structural barriers. His insistence on representation was both radical and pragmatic—affirmative action was not charity but a matter of justice. By embedding reservations in the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar sought to guarantee that democracy in India would be inclusive, protecting those historically denied equality. This foundational vision continues to shape debates today, reminding us that reservations were never merely about economic upliftment, but about securing dignity and dismantling caste hierarchies.



OBCs should not monopolize the benefits of reservation, and that affirmative action must reach those most in need. However, the Court explicitly excluded SCs and STs from this principle, citing their distinct historical disadvantage. For SCs and STs, the rationale was that caste oppression was so deeply entrenched that economic advancement alone could not erase its impact. This distinction has remained a cornerstone of reservation policy, though it has increasingly come under scrutiny as upward mobility among some SC/ST families raises questions about equitable distribution.

The Supreme Court has continued to play a pivotal role in shaping this discourse. In the Davinder Singh case of 2024, a Constitution Bench upheld sub-classification within SCs and STs, overruling the earlier E.V. Chinnaiah judgment of 2004, which had treated SCs as a homogeneous group. This marked a significant shift, recognizing that even within SCs and STs, disparities exist and that benefits could be more equitably distributed through sub-classification. Judicial voices, including Justice B.R. Gavai, have gone further, arguing that creamy layer exclusion should apply to SCs and STs to prevent elite capture of benefits. The Court has even raised the provocative question of whether children of highly placed SC/ST beneficiaries, such as senior bureaucrats, should continue to avail reservation benefits, given that their social and economic position is far removed from the realities of caste oppression.

These developments illustrate the evolving tension between the original constitutional vision of reservation as a remedy for entrenched social exclusion and the contemporary demand for equity within marginalized groups. The creamy layer debate for SCs and STs is not simply about income thresholds; it is about redefining the very purpose of affirmative action in a society where caste and class increasingly intersect. Whether Parliament chooses to act on this judicial provocation will determine the future trajectory of India's reservation system, balancing historical justice with present-day fairness.

At the heart of this debate lie three critical issues. The first is equity versus identity: should caste-based reservation remain untouched, or should economic filters be introduced to ensure fairness? The second is policy versus judiciary: who ultimately decides the contours of reservation—Parliament or the Supreme Court? The third is social mobility: how should the system balance recognition of historical disadvantage with the reality of upward mobility among some SC/ST families?

Comparative perspectives further illuminate the complexity of the issue. For OBCs, creamy layer exclusion is already implemented, ensuring that benefits reach the poorest. For SCs and STs, no such exclusion exists, though its possible extension could reduce elite capture while simultaneously diluting the caste-based rationale. The judiciary has permitted sub-classification and suggested creamy layer application, pushing for equitable distribution. The government, however, insists that Parliament alone can legislate such a change, emphasizing legislative supremacy.

Designing such policies is fraught with empirical challenges. Reliable socio-economic data on intra-group inequalities remains limited, and without robust surveys, sub-quotas or creamy layer exclusions risk being arbitrary. Political sensitivity adds another layer of complexity. Extending creamy layer to SCs and STs could trigger backlash from communities fearing erosion of constitutional safeguards, and political parties remain cautious, acutely aware of the electoral implications.

Globally, affirmative action debates echo similar tensions. In the United States, race-based quotas face scrutiny over whether economic filters should replace identity-based measures. In Brazil, affirmative action combines race and income criteria, offering a hybrid model that balances identity and economic disadvantage. These international examples show that India's dilemma is not unique, though its historical context makes the debate particularly charged.

The road ahead is uncertain. The judiciary has opened the door to sub-classification, signalling concern about equitable distribution. The government insists that only Parliament can legislate such a change, emphasizing democratic legitimacy. Communities remain divided, with some demanding intra-group equity and others fearing dilution of hard-won rights.

India's reservation system thus stands at a constitutional crossroads. Extending the creamy layer principle to SCs and STs could reshape affirmative action, balancing social justice with equity. Yet, the government's stance highlights that such a transformation must come through Parliament, not judicial fiat. The outcome of this debate will determine whether India's reservation policies continue to prioritize historical disadvantage alone or evolve to incorporate economic realities. Either way, the decision will profoundly influence the future of inclusive democracy and the lived experiences of millions of marginalized citizens.

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De-reservation and the Struggle for Transparency

Team UV



The debate over de-reservation has become one of the most pressing issues in India's reservation policy, exposing a deep divide between administrative convenience and constitutional safeguards. At the centre of this controversy lies the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), which recently admitted that consolidated data on de-reservation proposals is not readily available, and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), which has insisted on a thorough review to prevent erosion of Scheduled Caste rights. De-reservation—the practice of filling a reserved post with a general category candidate when no eligible candidate from the reserved category is available—was intended as a rare exception. Yet its increasing use has raised concerns about whether it undermines the spirit of affirmative action.

The DoPT's position rests on the provisions of the Right to Information Act, particularly Section 7(9), which allows denial of information if compiling it would excessively burden the public authority. It has emphasized that de-reservation proposals are scattered across Ministries and departments, and that the law does not require officers to create or interpret information beyond what is already available. According to existing rules, the final authority for de-reservation in direct recruitment posts lies with the Minister in charge of the DoPT, while promotion vacancies are decided by the respective Ministry. While legally sound, this framework has been criticized for creating silos of information that weaken oversight and accountability.

On the other side, the NCSC has raised strong objections to the manner in which de-reservation proposals are being processed. The Commission argues that many proposals are incomplete, failing to demonstrate adequate efforts to recruit candidates from reserved categories before resorting to de-reservation. To address this, the NCSC has decided to review all such proposals and make recommendations to ensure that reservation policy is implemented in both letter and spirit. Since 2024, four out of five Full Commission meetings have discussed de-reservation, underscoring its prominence in the Commission's agenda. Under the leadership of Chairperson Kishore Makwana, the issue has

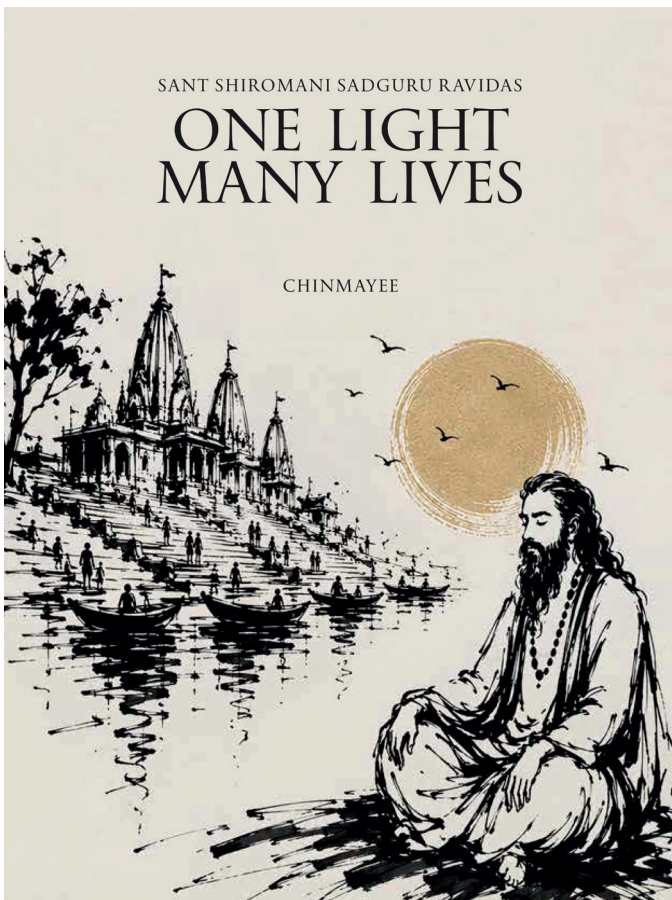
been prioritized, reflecting growing concern that Scheduled Castes may be losing ground in the struggle for representation.

This conflict must be understood within the broader constitutional and policy context. Reservation in India is not merely an administrative measure; it is a cornerstone of affirmative action, designed to counter centuries of caste-based exclusion and discrimination. The ban on de-reservation exists to protect these safeguards, with only narrow exceptions permitted. The current tussle therefore reflects a deeper tension between administrative convenience and constitutional commitment. While the DoPT cites logistical challenges, the NCSC insists that transparency and accountability are non-negotiable when it comes to protecting the rights of marginalized communities.

The implications of this debate are far-reaching. The absence of consolidated data creates a transparency deficit, making it difficult to assess whether reserved posts are being filled fairly or whether de-reservation is being misused. Frequent de-reservation risks diluting the constitutional promise of representation for Scheduled Castes, undermining the rationale of affirmative action. The clash between DoPT and NCSC also highlights institutional friction, pointing to the need for better coordination and stronger monitoring mechanisms.

Moving forward, several measures could help bridge this gap. Establishing a centralized database of de-reservation proposals would ensure that oversight bodies have access to accurate information. Mandatory disclosure requirements could compel Ministries to document all efforts made to fill reserved posts before seeking de-reservation. Strengthening the authority of the NCSC to review and veto incomplete proposals would enhance accountability. Finally, periodic audits of de-reservation practices could ensure compliance with constitutional safeguards and build public trust in the system.

At its heart, the debate over de-reservation is not merely administrative—it is a question of India's commitment to social justice and inclusivity. The DoPT's logistical concerns cannot outweigh the constitutional imperative of protecting marginalized communities. For India's reservation system to remain credible, data transparency, accountability, and strict adherence to constitutional principles must be treated as essential.



The 650th birth anniversary celebrations of Sant Shiromani Sadguru Ravidas are being observed across the nation with devotion, enthusiasm and a renewed commitment to his timeless message of social harmony. Grand events, processions and Paavan Mati Kalash Distribution programmes are being organised across states and districts. As part of these programmes, sacred soil from Sant Ravidas's birthplace is being carried in consecrated kalash to different parts of the country, symbolically connecting communities with the saint's life, philosophy and spiritual legacy.

Sant Shiromani Sadguru Ravidas – One Light Many Lives

Pramod

It is in the spirit of these celebrations that the Social Studies Foundation has undertaken an initiative to bring the teachings and philosophy of Sant Ravidas to contemporary readers through a new book, 'Sant Shiromani Sadguru Ravidas – One Light Many Lives'. The book focuses on some of the most enduring ideas associated with Sant Ravidas—human dignity, universal brotherhood, spiritual equality and his inspiring vision of 'Be-gam'pura, a society free from sorrow, discrimination and hierarchy.

Authored by Chinmayee, who has earlier written a widely acclaimed book on Lokmata Ahilyadevi Holkar, the book seeks to present Sant Ravidas not merely as a saint of his time but as a profound thinker whose ideas continue to have relevance in the contemporary world.

The book is divided into four sections. These explore the making of Sant Ravidas, his spiritual world, his teachings on the architecture of a just society, and the legacy he has left behind. Together, the four sections provide a comprehensive picture of the saint's life and thought, while also examining the larger social and spiritual significance of his teachings.

At the heart of Sant Ravidas's philosophy was the recognition of the inherent dignity of every human being. He lived in a period when social discrimination and rigid hierarchies were deeply entrenched. Yet, his response was not one of confrontation or bitterness. Through a soft, simple and convincing idiom, he questioned prevailing notions of high and low and emphasised the essential unity of

बेगमपुरा शहर को नाऊ। दूखु अन्दोहु नाहीं तिहि ठाऊ॥
 ना तसवीस खिराजु न मालु। खउफु न खता न तरसु जवालु॥
 अब मोहि खूब बतन गहि पाई। ऊहां खैरि सदा मेरे भाई॥
 काइमु दाइमु सदा पातिसाही। दोम न सेम एक सो आही॥
 आबादान सदा मसहूर। ऊहां गनी बसहि मामूर॥
 तिउ तिउ सैल करहि जिउ भावै। महल न को अटकावै॥
 कहि रविदास खलास चमारा। जो हम सहरी सो मीत हमारा॥

humankind.

One of the remarkable features of Sant Ravidas's teachings was the language in which he communicated. He did not confine spiritual wisdom to an elite or scholarly world. Instead, he expressed profound truths in a manner that ordinary people could understand and relate to. His words brought the idea of the Divine closer to everyday life and helped people recognise the spiritual unity underlying human existence.

His celebrated vision of 'Be-gam'pura—the 'city without sorrow'—is perhaps one of the most powerful expressions of this philosophy. It represents an ideal society in which fear, suffering, discrimination and social hierarchy have no place. 'Be-gum'pura can therefore be understood not simply as a spiritual aspiration but also as a vision of a just and harmonious social order. It is a vision that continues to resonate in a world still grappling with inequality, exclusion and divisions of identity.

The book also examines the broader meanings embedded in the many miracles that are widely believed to have occurred during Sant Ravidas's life. These stories, apart from their devotional significance, can be viewed as reflections of the values he embodied—faith, compassion, humility and the triumph of spiritual truth over social prejudice.

Equally significant is the diversity of Sant Ravidas's disciples and followers. They came from different sections of society, crossing boundaries of caste, social status, wealth and gender. His spiritual influence thus transcended the divisions that society had created. The community around him became, in many ways, a living manifestation of his belief in the oneness and dignity of humanity.

Sant Ravidas's travels across the country add another dimension to this message. His

journeys demonstrate how spiritual experience can transcend geographical boundaries. His message travelled with him, reaching people across regions and communities and reinforcing the idea that the experience of human and Divine oneness cannot be restricted by geography.

'Sant Shiromani Sadguru Ravidas – One Light Many Lives' therefore comes at an important moment. As the nation commemorates the 650th birth anniversary of Sant Ravidas, the book invites readers to look beyond celebration and engage with the deeper significance of his teachings.

His message is remarkably simple yet profound: every human being possesses inherent dignity; the Divine is one; and society must aspire to transcend divisions that diminish human worth. In an age seeking greater social harmony, Sant Ravidas's vision of Be-gum'pura offers not merely a memory of the past but a compelling aspiration for the future—a society in which equality, compassion, fraternity and human dignity illuminate the lives of all.

In that sense, the title 'Sant Shiromani Sadguru Ravidas – One Light Many Lives' captures the enduring essence of Sant Ravidas's legacy: one universal spiritual light, expressed through countless human lives, yet capable of bringing them together in the shared experience of humanity.

The Book is therefore a must-read for avowed readers and worth the collection for collectors!

(The Book will be available to the readers in the last week of September, 2026 at a price of INR. 500/-. Kindly contact on 9699644930)

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When Caste Walks Into the Classroom

A poster appeared on the campus of IIT Mandi. Referring to the Bhagavad Gita, it said that Shudras should “serve higher classes”. The institute has ordered an inquiry. Its Director, Laxmidhar Behera, has reportedly said that the poster reflected students’ interpretation of the scripture and did not represent the institute’s position. The poster may eventually be removed. An inquiry may identify those responsible.

But there is a larger question that should not disappear with the poster: Why does caste still find its way into places where young Indians are supposed to learn, think and imagine a different future?

For Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, caste entered the classroom long before he had the words to explain what it meant. As a schoolboy, Dr. Ambedkar was made to sit separately from other children because he belonged to the Mahar community. He could not drink water freely. He



had to depend on someone from an upper caste to pour water for him. If that person was not available, there was no water for him. Imagine being a child and learning that even drinking water has a caste.

Dr. Ambedkar carried these experiences throughout his life. Yet they did not stop him from pursuing education. He went on to study at Columbia University and the London School of Economics, became a lawyer and scholar, and eventually played a central role in drafting India’s Constitution.

His life showed both the power of education and the stubbornness of caste. A school can open its gates to you and still make you feel that you do not belong there. That contradiction has not entirely disappeared.

For years, caste discrimination in professional life was often hidden behind respectable-sounding phrases. One such phrase was “Not Found Suitable.” A candidate could possess the necessary qualifications and still be rejected, while the reason remained safely buried behind a seemingly neutral decision.

Today, the conversation is increasingly moving inside educational institutions themselves.

SC and ST students are now present in

universities, IITs, medical colleges and other elite institutions in greater numbers. This is an important change. But representation does not automatically mean acceptance. The old question—who belongs here?—can take new forms.

A student may be admitted through reservation and then have their ability questioned. Their success may be attributed to their caste rather than their hard work. Their presence can become part of a larger argument about “merit”. This is where the debate around reservation becomes important. The repeated claim that reservation destroys merit conveniently forgets India’s unequal past. For generations, access to education and social opportunity was shaped by birth. Some communities had schools, books, land, money and social networks available to them; others were denied even basic dignity.

Reservation did not create caste & Varna. Caste & Varna created the need for reservation. There can be a legitimate debate about how reservation should work, whether it needs reform and how equality of opportunity can be improved. But that is very different from suggesting that people who benefit from constitutional safeguards are somehow less deserving.

The problem becomes more serious when these ideas enter India’s premier educational institutions. The IITs are symbols of achievement and aspiration. Students spend years preparing to enter them, families make enormous sacrifices, and society treats an IIT degree as proof of exceptional ability.

These institutions therefore carry a responsibility beyond teaching engineering. They must ensure that a student’s caste does not become a reason to question their intelligence, dignity or right to be there. The IIT Mandi incident is troubling precisely because it brings an old social idea into a modern institution. We are living in an age of artificial intelligence, space missions, biotechnology and advanced engineering. Yet a message telling one section of society that its role is to serve another can still appear on a university campus.

We can send machines into space while carrying centuries-old ideas about human worth.

That is the contradiction India needs to confront. The idea that some people are born to serve others is not new. Nor is the attempt to defend caste hierarchy through religious or social arguments. What has changed is the language and the setting.

Today, such thinking can appear in a social-



media post, a campus discussion, an argument about merit or an anti-reservation campaign. When repeated often enough, prejudice begins to appear normal. That is how caste survives in modern India—not necessarily through the old rules, but through attitudes that keep those old ideas alive.

The answer cannot simply be to remove one poster. Educational institutions need to create an environment where students can speak about caste discrimination without fear and where complaints are taken seriously. Teachers and administrators also need to recognise that discrimination is not always loud or obvious. Sometimes it is a remark, a stereotype, a joke or a constant questioning of someone's ability.

But this is not only an institutional problem. It is a problem for Indian society. The Constitution attempted to break the connection between birth and human worth. Dr. Ambedkar's own life was proof of what that change could make possible.

He was once a child who could not drink water at school because of his caste. He became

one of the principal makers of a Constitution that promised equality and dignity to every citizen.

That journey represents one of India's greatest possibilities: education can challenge the barriers created by birth. But education can also reproduce those barriers if institutions fail to confront them.

The IIT Mandi poster, therefore, is not simply about a poster. It asks whether India's most prestigious educational institutions are genuinely preparing young Indians for a society based on equality—or whether some of the country's oldest prejudices are quietly travelling with them into the future.

India cannot call itself modern merely because its young people work with the world's most advanced technology. Modernity is also about how we treat the person sitting next to us. If an old caste hierarchy can still walk into a modern classroom, then Dr. Ambedkar's battle is not over. And perhaps that is the question the IITs—and India—need to answer.

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Himachal Pradesh CM Orders Removal of Caste Column From School Admission Forms

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Wednesday ordered the removal of the caste column from school admission forms from the next academic session, saying the move would help promote equality and curb caste-based discrimination.

Chairing a meeting of the Himachal Pradesh Scheduled Caste Welfare Board, Sukhu said SC students would still be required to provide caste details while availing themselves of government schemes and benefits. Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Dhani Ram Shandil said nearly ₹315 crore had been allocated this financial year for the welfare of SCs, STs, OBCs, women, children and senior citizens, while ₹1,105 crore had been earmarked under the Scheduled Caste Development Programme.

Kerala HC: Be Lenient While Verifying SC/ST Caste Status

The Kerala High Court has directed authorities to adopt a lenient approach while verifying the caste status of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) members and not expect them to prove their claims like ordinary citizens.

A Division Bench of Justices A.K. Jayasankaran Nambiar and A.K. Preetha said denial of constitutionally guaranteed SC/ST benefits

should be limited to exceptional cases of apparent fraud established through independent material available with the State. The court made the observation while hearing a plea by retired postal assistant V. Balan, whose ST status was questioned following a Vigilance inquiry.



India Rejects UN Panel Report on Alleged Caste, Religious Discrimination

India has rejected a report by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) that raised concerns over alleged caste, ethnic and religious discrimination and rights violations in the country.

Following its periodic review, the UN committee expressed "grave concern" over alleged targeting of tribal and disadvantaged communities and called for action against reported hate crimes, excessive use of force, extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detention.

The Ministry of External Affairs dismissed the report as "politically motivated and highly malicious".

Compiled by Prajvalant.



DINVISHESH

Remembering Shrimant Shankardev

26th Sept

Shrimant Shankardev Birth Anniversary

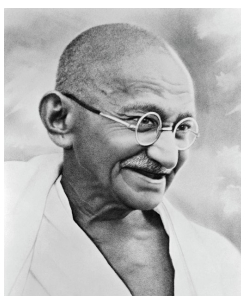


Shrimant Shankardev, the 15th–16th century saint, reformer, and cultural icon from Assam, is remembered as one of the most influential figures in shaping Assamese society. Born in 1449, he dedicated his life to spiritual awakening, social reform, and cultural renaissance. Shankardev was the pioneer of the Neo Vaishnavite movement in Assam, which emphasized devotion to Lord Krishna through bhakti rather than ritualistic practices. His teachings sought to transcend caste barriers, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds into a common spiritual fold.

Beyond religion, Shankardev's contributions to literature, music, and drama left an indelible mark on Assamese identity. He composed devotional songs (Borgeets), authored plays (Ankiya Naat), and wrote philosophical texts that blended spirituality with social ethics. His establishment of Satras (monastic institutions) and Namghars (community prayer halls) created spaces for collective worship, dialogue, and social cohesion. These institutions became centers of education, cultural preservation, and moral guidance, fostering unity in a fragmented society.



27th September
Raja Ram Mohan Roy
Birth Anniversary



2nd October
Gandhi Jayanti



2nd October
Ram Manohar Lohia
Death Anniversary



5th October
Jogendranath Mandal
Death Anniversary

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