UNIT 9 : PROBLEMS OF BACKWARD CLASSES

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to-

- explain the meaning of backward classes
- understand the different problems faced by the backward classes
- discuss the policies/measures taken to uplift the people of backward classes
- analyze the effects of caste atrocities

9.2 INTRODUCTION

While the term 'backward classes' has not been defined by the Indian Constitution, the characteristics of backwardness are randomly described and sometimes a certain categorization is given. Articles of the Indian Constitution however are a pointer to the steps taken in the direction of socio-economic development of backward classes.

Giving credence to the fact that Indian society is made up hundreds of millions of people who live in abject poverty in different rural and tribal belts, are illiterate and unaware of their rights, the Constitution focused upon the social, economic and political justice along with equality of status to be meted out to these groups of people.

Article 16 (4) uses the term 'backward class' and speaks of inadequate representation in services. Article 46 mentions the weaker sections of the people and includes in that expression the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Article 340 empowers the State to investigate the conditions of the backward class and to help them by equiding grants.

While Article 14 and 15 (1) and (2) emphasize equality of all citizens before law and prohibit discrimination on grounds of caste, creed, birth etc., Article 15 (4) asserts that these Constitutional provisions do not prevent the State from making special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Hence, the Constitution has recognized the fact that special and distinct provisions are required to help the socially and economically backward classes in the social milieu of India.

Backward class therefore includes various categories of people who are severely marginalized in various aspects of their lives. Their problems need to be mitigated for a holistic development of the nation.

9.3 BACKWARD CLASSES

As is seen from the discussion above, you may note that the Constitution refers to the term 'backward classes' in Articles 15(4), 16(4) and 340(1). While Articles 15(4) and 16(4) empower the State to make special provisions for any socially and educationally backward class of citizens, Article 340(1) authorizes the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes. The term 'backward classes' which had originally been in use during colonial times had multiple referents, but lacked any clearly defined parameter regarding the inclusion and

exclusion of groups described collectively as backward. In fact, the term, at least in its early usage, denoted an all-encompassing category that included the underprivileged and marginalized castes, tribes and communities.

Unlike the clarity in categorization of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the definition of 'backward classes' is not precise. It signifies other categories of people who are generally underprivileged and marginalized.

The Constitution through the Article 340(1) empowers the State to investigate the condition of socially and educationally backward classes and appoint a Commission for the purpose. The First Backward Commission which was appointed under Article 340(1) which submitted its Report in 1955. The Report presented a list of 2399 castes and communities considered as backward. Of these, 237 were considered as most backward, requiring special attention. Thus the category 'backward classes' was bifurcated into two categories - the Backwards and the most Backwards. The Report was rejected by the Union Government for having used 'caste' and not an economic criterion for identifying Backward Classes.

In 1980, the Second All India Backward Classes Commission known popularly as the Mandal Commission, submitted its report . The Commission devised 11 indicators which was a combination of caste and class features for assessing social and educational backwardness among different population groups. Following the new categorization a list of 3473 castes were declared as backward. Hence, the tangible indicators to ascertain a caste or any social group as backward included their lower position in the class hierarchy, lower age at marriage within the group, higher female work participation, higher school dropout rate, inaccessibility to drinking water, lower average value of family assets, higher existence of Kutcha houses and so on. The report of the Mandal Commission was partially implemented in 1991.

The Other Backward Classes (OBC) in terms of the Government of India notification of 8th September, 1993 include castes and communities which are named in both the lists contained in the Report of the Second All India Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission) and in the list

of individual State Governments.(http://arc.gov.in/arc_7th_report/ARC_7th Report_Ch8.pdf)

9.4 SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE SCs, STs and the OBCs

Class in India is considered to be a type of social stratification. It stands for a group of people who share similar socio-economic status or position. Another type of social stratification is caste, which however is a closed system unlike class which is relatively open. A closed system is distinguished from an open system on the basis of ease of attaining membership. In class groups it is much easier for attaining upward mobility on the basis of change of certain parameters like education, achievement etc. However, caste group membership is strictly ascribed. If its members are economically and educationally less privileged compared to other classes, that class is generally considered to be backward.

The backward class in India can be understood within the larger frame of understanding the basic character of Indian society which consists of a number of closed status groups. The 'backward class' does not mean a single group but is rather constituted by a number of different groups of people who represent varied social groups with different status component within the social hierarchy of Indian society.

The backward classes thus are afflicted by several problems and issues which put them at the disadvantaged spectrum of the social set-up. They suffer from various disadvantages and disabilities like low status, poverty and illiteracy, which are somehow linked to their social group.

The Constitution of India outlines the characteristics of backwardness in the various Articles. For example, as has been stated before, Article 15 (4) is related to social and educational backwardness. Article 16 (4) addresses backward classes and their inadequate representation in services. Article 46 refers to weaker sections of the people in which the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are included.

The Constitution not only makes references to characteristics of backwardness but also outlines various provisions for the uplift of their lot. Under Article 46 stated above, the Constitution lays down various problems to overcome the problems of social disabilities. It states that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic advancement of the weaker section of the people, in particular the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Under Article 340 a provision has been made for the State Government to look into the condition of the backward classes.

Along with such references of backwardness, the Constitution also makes a special provision for their uplift. To overcome the problems of social disabilities the Constitution has laid down certain provisions under Article 46. It states that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic advancement of the weaker section of the people, in particular the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Finally, there is the Article 340 which makes provision for the State Government to investigate the condition of the backward classes. Hence, it is imperative to examine each category of backward classes like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes' composition.

The backward classes are largely composed of a very extensive yet mixed category of persons. They comprise a significant part of the population count of the country, roughly estimated as one third of the total population . They include the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes.

There is a serious lack of credible official statistical data to highlight the plight of backward classes and this poses a serious handicap in fully understanding the extent of deprivations and neglect suffered by these classes. In recent years, the conditions of these classes seems to have deteriorated augmented with decline in employment opportunities in traditional occupations like weaving, fishing etc. in which a large number of people of these classes have been traditionally engaged. It is only from the Ninth Plan onwards that the Central plan allocations for development and welfare of backward classes were initiated. However, greater allocations

are needed to improve the skills of the backward classes in order to ensure their welfare and development.

The Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe : Some Facts

- Atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and untouchability remain unabated even fifty years after untouchability was abolished by the Constitution.
- Landlessness is increasing amongst the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The proportion of cultivators amongst them is going down while that of agricultural labourers is increasing.
- Allocation of funds for the development and welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes over the years has been inadequate and has declined in recent years.
- Representation of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in Group `A' and Group `B' posts in Central Government remains inadequate. In case of STs inadequacy exists even in Group 'C' & Group 'D' posts.

Since independence, the Indian economy has grown considerably. Rapid industrialisation introduction of new technologies, modernisation of agriculture, and large scale production of goods and services have led to a marked expansion of the economy. The introduction of economic reforms in 1991 leading to abolishing the licence-quota raj, privatization of several government owned enterprises, reducing restrictions on exports and imports and reforms in the finance and banking sectors have triggered economic growth.

However, mere economic growth is not enough; growth should be accompanied by multifaceted human development. Human development includes an overall progress of the spirit of man and leads to expansion of freedom and human rights to all people so that they have the capability to lead the kind of life they value. It means attaining freedom from fear, repression, discrimination and exploitation, freedom to lead a life of dignity, freedom from hunger and ignorance and freedom to participate in decision-making in an informed and intelligent manner.

The SCs, STs and the OBC face various issues and problems amidst claims of having easy access to various opportunities through the system of reservations. Apart from facing political marginalization, these groups of people face innumerable social and economic problems that affect their daily lives to a large extent.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - A

1. What are the different problems faced by the people of the backwards classes?
2. State True or False:

(a) Human development means expanding the freedoms of and assuring human rights to all people so that they have the capability to lead the kind of life they value.

(b) Article 340 makes provision for the State Government to investigate the condition of the backward classes.

9.5 POLICIES AND MEASURES TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

9.5.1 CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The deep concern of the framers of the Constitution for the uplift of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes is reflected in the elaborate Constitutional mechanism set-up for their upliftment and Let us take an overview of the important provisions taken up by the Constitution in this context:

- Article 17 abolishes Untouchability.
- Article 46 requires the State 'to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Article 335 provides that the claims of the members of the Scheduled

Castes and the Scheduled Tribes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State.

- Article 15(4) refers to the special provisions for their advancement.
- Article 16(4A) speaks of "reservation in matters of promotion to any class or classes of posts in the services under the State in favour of SCs/STs, which are not adequately represented in the services under the State'.
- Article 338 provides for a National Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with duties to investigate and monitor all matters relating to safeguards provided for them, to inquire into specific complaints and to participate and advise on the planning process of their socio-economic development etc.
- Article 330 and Article 332 of the Constitution respectively provide for reservation of seats in favour of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People and in the legislative assemblies of the States.
- Under Part IX relating to the Panchayats and Part IXA of the Constitution relating to the Municipalities, reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in local bodies has been envisaged and provided.
- Part IX and Part IXA of the Constitution respectively permit the legislature of a State to make provision for reservation of seats in Panchayat and Municipalities in favour of backward classes of citizens.
- Article 340 of the Constitution provides for appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of Backward classes.

- Article 16(4) and 16(4A) respectively permit reservation of appointments or posts and in matters of promotion in favour of backward classes not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- Article 15(4) permits the State to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizen. In addition to these, there are also other Constitutional provisions for the welfare and socio-economic empowerment of the Scheduled Caste, the Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes.
- According to the Article 15, the state should not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of caste, creed, etc. More positively, Article 15(4) further states that the state may (in spite of right to equality) make special provisions for the welfare of socially and educationally backward classes. Thus, if the State takes any measures in favour of these castes and communities if would not be challenged on the ground of right to equality.
- According to provisions of Article 19, the state can impose reasonable restrictions on the freedom of movement and residence of people, in the interest of Scheduled Tribes.
- Article 46 of Constitutional provisions directs the State to protect the educational interests of the weaker section of society especially the Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribes.
- According to the provisions of Article 330, 332 and 334, the seats are reserved in the Parliament and State Legislatures in favour of the Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their number in the population.
- Article 335 provides that the State shall consider the claim of members of SC/ST for making the reservation in services, keeping in mind the efficiency of the administration.

- The Article 338 of the constitutional provision (as amended in 1990 by 65th Amendment) provides for the establishment of National Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribe for the effective implementation of these safeguards and for the protection , welfare and advancement of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- As per the provisions of Article 339, the President is authorized to appoint a Commission after 10 years of the commencement of the Constitution to report on the administration of Scheduled Area and the welfare of Scheduled Castes.

  The Government of India is also empowered to issue suitable directions to State for the welfare of Scheduled Area and Scheduled Tribes.
- Article 275(1) of the Constitution makes provision that the Union of India shall make grants to States for implementing welfare schemes in Scheduled Areas and for Scheduled Tribes.
- The Fifth and the Sixth Schedules of the constitution (with reference to article 244) make special provisions for the administration and welfare of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes.
- As per the provision of the Constitution, there shall be a separate Ministry in few states viz Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Orissa etc. which will be charged with the responsibility for the welfare of Scheduled castes in the States.
- The 85th amendment of the Constitution restores reservation in promotion in government jobs to the member of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

9.5.2 POLICIES

India follows a policy of positive discrimination which is executed through a planned and systematic policy of reservations.

It is an extension of the concept of equality of opportunity as outlined by the Constitution of India. The system of reservations follows a deliberate policy of differential access to opportunities by certain sections of population groups in sectors like government jobs, enrolment in higher educational institutions, access to seats in the different legislatures. Such policy decisions are implemented by both the Central and State governments of the country at various levels of administrative action

The basis of reservation is linked to varied experiences. To a very large extent the socio-economic and political disadvantages faced by the backward classes both in the past and in the contemporary times are a determining factor in justifying "reservation". Backward groups are identified based on criteria such as gender, caste, tribe, and linguistic minority status. Reservation is governed by constitutional laws, statutory laws, and local rules and regulations and it generally consists of the process of facilitating a person in education, scholarship, jobs, and in promotion who has category certificates. Reservation is considered to be an indispensable affirmative action at social assimilation. The primary beneficiaries of the reservation policies under the Constitution -the backward classes- are more often than not deprived from their rights and this has necessitated a renewal of policy objectives.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - B

Write True or False

1. According to Article 330, 332 and 334, the seats are reserved in the Parliament and State Legislatures in favour of the Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their number in the population.
2. Part IX and Part IXA of the Constitution respectively permit the legislature of a State to make provision for reservation of seats in Panchayat and Municipalities in favour of backward classes of citizens.

9.6 CASTE ATROCITIES

We have seen that Article 17 of the Constitution abolished untouchability. The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 was enacted to prevent atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The Act is popularly known as POA, the SC/ST Act, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, or simply the Atrocities Act.

In 1990, a study conducted by the National Commission for SCs and STs entitled *Atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes* : Causes and Remedies pointed out various causal factors for atrocities. These included land disputes; land alienation; bonded labour; indebtedness; non-payment of minimum wages; caste prejudice and practice of untouchability. Conflict emerge due to the involvement of political factions on caste lines; refusal to perform traditional works such as digging burial pits, arranging cremations, removing carcasses of dead animals and beating drums; etc.

The deep root cause for the backward classes bearing the brunt of atrocities is attributable to the caste system; wherein social groups are ordered on the basis of the so-called purity-impurity clause. Again,a person is considered a member of the caste into which s/he is born and continues to remains within that caste until death.

The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to prevent atrocities against scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The Act is popularly known as POA, the SC/ST Act, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, or simply the Atrocities Act.

The Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe : Some Facts

- The suicide of Rohith Vemula on 18 January 2016 sparked protests and outrage from across India and gained widespread media attention as an alleged case of discrimination against Dalits and backward classes in India in which elite educational institutions have been purportedly seen as an enduring vestige

of caste-based discrimination against students belonging to "backward classes".

- On May 14, 2015, clashes between Jats and Dalits in Dangawas village of Rajasthan's Nagaur district left 4 people dead and 13 injured
- On December 2012 approximately 268 dwellings - huts, tiled-roof and one or two-room concrete houses of Dalits of the Adi Dravida community near Naikkankottai in Dharmapuri district of western Tamil Nadu were torched by the higher-caste Vanniyar most dominant caste group. The victims have alleged that 'systematic destruction' of their properties and livelihood resources has taken place



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - C

1. Fill in the blanks

(a) _____ is also known as the POA.

(b) _____ of the Constitution abolished untouchability.

2. The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 was enacted to prevent atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. (True/False)



9.7 LET US SUM UP

- Backward class therefore includes various categories of people who are severely marginalized in various aspects of their lives. Their problems need to be mitigated for a holistic development of the nation. The backward class in India can be understood only when we understand the basic character of Indian society which consists of a number of closed status groups. The 'backward class' does not constitute one single whole but a multitude of social groups with

varying positions and socio-economic standing in the social hierarchy of Indian society

- Absence of official statistical data in respect of backward classes is a serious handicap in fully visualizing the extent of deprivations suffered by these classes. The conditions of these classes seem to have deteriorated in recent years with decline in employment opportunities in traditional occupations like weaving, fishing etc. in which a large number of people of these classes have been traditionally engaged. Central plan allocations for development and welfare of backward classes have been started only from the Ninth Plan and allocations made, so far, are grossly inadequate. Targeted measures and greater allocations are needed to improve their skills and to ensure their welfare and development.
- The backward classes suffer from disadvantages and disabilities which are age- old. Low status, poverty and illiteracy are social problems which they have inherited due to their ascribed status of being born in a low caste or tribe. The Indian Constitution is silent on the definition of the backward classes.
- Characteristics of backwardness described and spread over the different articles of the Constitution. Article 15 (4) speaks of social and educational backwardness. In article 16 (4), mention is made of backward classes and their inadequate representation in services. Article 46 refers to weaker section of the people in which the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are included.
- The system of reservation of India is a form of positive discrimination. It follows from the concept of equality of opportunity as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Reservation is the result of laws, guidelines, and administrative action by the different levels of governments in India, and includes reserved or exclusive access to seats in the different legislatures, to government jobs, and to enrolment in higher educational institutions.



9.8 FURTHER READING

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer Check your progress A

1(a). Low status, poverty and illiteracy

2(a) True

2(b) True

Answer Check your progress B

1. True
2. True

Answer Check your progress C

1 (a) The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 ,

(b) Article 17

2. True



9.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words

Q.1. What do you understand by the term 'backward classes' in the context of Indian society? What are the different categories of people who are considered to belong to this section?

Q.2. What are the Constitutional provisions for the uplift of the 'backward classes'? Elaborate on the provisions.

Q.3. Do you think that the different categories of people belonging to the so-called 'backward classes' face issues and problems in society? Comment

Q.4. Briefly discuss the different policy measures undertaken for the betterment of the 'backward classes'. Give suitable examples

Q.5. Write a short note on Caste atrocities in India with reference to some recent incidents.

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