

## **Scheduled Caste Policy in India: History, Problems, Outlook**

**Ravi Hebsur**

Research Scholar, Dept of Sociology, Karnatak University, Dharwad, Karnataka, India

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### **Abstract**

The present paper reviews the literature related to the reasons for policy made in the British period and colonial age in India, and the same formula followed by post-independent governments in India until now. The paper discussed in two mainframes that how the government policies affect the grounds of scheduled caste people in history and how these were calculated at present time with the development of the world scenario from the British period, pre-independent and how it's working in the government policies. In the second stage, the paper discussed the present condition of the caste with social phenomenon as well as policy level development in the social condition of the scheduled caste people.

**KEYWORDS:** Untouchability, Varna system, Hinduism, Policy Development

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### **Introduction:**

The expression "Scheduled Castes" is a legitimate assignment. It was established in 1935 when the British recorded the least arrangements in Hindu ranks in a Schedule attached to the Government of India Act for reasons for statutory shields and different advantages. The idea "Booked Castes" is pertinent just in a setting of statutory arrangements, government projects and legislative issues. Outside this specific circumstance, there are no "booked" positions. Then again, there is a various population, numbering around 64.5 million at the last record, logically introduced to various networks, each with its very own character, conventions and issues. While the networks may confront comparable issues, they are regularly profoundly inconsistent with one another. They were "planned" by the administration and can be truly treated as a solitary classification just when managing parts of this association with the legislature. This is the worry of the present paper, and it is limited to a great extent to the administration end of the condition. We will manage the general approach and its basis, how the Scheduled Castes were characterized and the conditions at the time, the perspectives on Gandhi, and a few highlights of the current circumstance.

### **Government Policy and the Defining of Scheduled Castes**

The legislature in India has accepted a wide-going duty regarding the welfare of the Scheduled Castes is notable. Both in a number of advantages included and in the size of the gathering qualified for them, the Indian arrangement of separation for the most in reverse areas of the common people is going on the world.

Concisely: Seats are saved in the extent to the population in the Union and State assemblies, with the extra arrangement at different dimensions of government. Different

reservations, regularly equivalent to or more prominent than the extent of the population, are accommodated direct enrollment and a few sorts of limited time posts in taxpayer driven organization; various different concessions oblige them. Reservations are additionally given to admission to numerous higher instructive foundations. Money related help is conceded under an assortment of projects, eminently in training. Generally, a large portion of the Scheduled Caste conspires under the Five-Year Plans is for education, and another quarter is for housing. The rest is for a welter of another welfare program, which, while small and scattered, covers quite a wide range of benefits. Finally, to combat social discrimination against the Scheduled Castes, there is a very comprehensive law, the Untouchability (Offenses) Act of 1955, and some expenditure on propaganda and related schemes. Since the 1955 law reverses the onus of proof from the accuser to accused when the accuser is member of the Scheduled Castes, it tends to be operative only for them.

There are also, of course, general development and welfare programs which are aimed at those categories of population in which the Scheduled Castes are found in significant numbers. These are intended to benefit the Scheduled Castes along with others. Here, the criteria for eligibility for benefits depending on the kind of benefits involved. The difference between these and the special concessions is, really, that the latter adds another criterion of eligibility, which protects the Scheduled Castes' interests by making other persons ineligible. This protective character of the policy of favoured discrimination is one of its main features.

Another feature of the policy is that it is by definition temporary. Because of the possible danger to national integration and the risk of building what is called a "vested interest in the survival of untouchability," all sides have emphasized the temporary character of the benefits. The argument for the policy is that despite the risks, it is the only realistic way to proceed, Indian society being what it is. To impose a legal structure of equality simply perpetuates the inequality, the argument runs, so temporary inequality in favour of those at the bottom is essential. Caste concessions provide an administrative shortcut for ensuring that the benefits get through to those who need them the most; without the protective caste criterion, it is believed, the benefits would be subject to abuses and diversion into other hands. In addition, the Scheduled Caste leaders seem to feel that until they are adequately represented in the upper ranks of government service, they cannot trust officials to administer other types of benefits in good faith.

Who are the Scheduled Castes and under what circumstances were they scheduled? Formerly known officially as Depressed Classes, they were the Untouchables, now sometimes called "ex-Untouchables" because of the legal abolition of untouchability. Untouchability is not defined either in the Constitutional Article, which abolishes it or in the law, which punishes its practice. I have never seen a satisfactory conceptual definition of this term, and I suspect that it may be impossible to give one.

The definitions of "untouchability" most often given in India cover two senses: First, untouchability is the stigma attached to certain people because of the pollution they convey. It is a stigma by caste; from birth, not from deeds performed; it lasts throughout life and cannot be ritually eliminated. The concept of ritual pollution by caste pervades the whole traditional caste structure, and untouchability, in this sense of the term, is

conceptually no different in kind. It is different only in degree and is used for that pollution-by-caste which is so great that the rest of society segregates the members of these castes and protects itself against them.

In its second sense, "untouchability" refers to the set of practices engaged in by the rest of society to protect itself from the pollution conveyed by the Untouchables and to symbolize their inferior status. This is the most common use of the term. Untouchability is rarely defined in a sentence; it is usually described in terms of civil, social and religious disabilities. But there is much more to the problems and policies than how untouchability is defined. It has always been assumed that the Untouchables not only have the lowest socio-religious status but also suffer, as a group, from the worst poverty, ignorance and exploitation; that they are to be found at the bottom of every scale because in traditional society the various systems are intimately interrelated and interdependent. Whether or not the assumption is invariably correct, the entire structure of official protective discrimination rests on it.

Indeed, one way of stating the policy is that it is intended to break down the traditional correlation on which it is itself based. Some people will avail themselves of the opportunities more than others will, and they will advance more rapidly in some ways than in others. Eventually, it is expected, the social status of the castes concerned will catch up with their advancement in other respects so that the completely bottom-ranking category will be eliminated and integrated with the rest of society. Another quite common way of putting the policy, then, is that temporary statutory recognition is given to the existing separation of the Scheduled Castes in order to make them un-separate. In much of the public rhetoric on the subject, all the special benefits are regarded as means to the removal of untouchability, the benefits being granted on a caste basis because untouchability is a caste-related phenomenon. There is some conceptual logic to this last point, but I submit that the historical logic, though not contradictory, was rather different.

The British after all built up the approach of protective position segregation. The present government just acquired the current framework. It extraordinarily extended the projects however rolled out a couple of substantive improvements in approach. Moreover, the Depressed Classes were in no way, shape or form the first to get extraordinary concessions. Under the British, particular vested parties and public minorities were conceded various protects or benefits, including portrayal by selection or discretionary concessions. In 1906, separate electorates were allowed to the Muslims, who guaranteed that their backwardness with respect to the Hindu dominant part put them off guard and that subsequently, shields were important to guarantee them a considerable amount of any capacity to be exchanged from the British to the Indians. With every devolution of intensity from Britain, different networks progressed comparable cases progressively too.

The Depressed Classes were comparative latecomers. Few of them could qualify for the franchise, and those who could be politically so weak as to be of negligible importance but for the sympathetic consideration, they received from the British. Under the Montford reforms, Depressed Class representatives were nominated to the legislatures. Later, when further reforms were pending, it was evident that additional safeguards were likely to be granted them.

It was in this context that the depressed castes were defined and scheduled and their population determined. Some provinces and states were already using Depressed Class lists, mainly for educational concessions, but they had drawn them up using somewhat different criteria. In the early thirties, for the first time, efforts were made to determine criteria which could be applied on an all-India basis, and this also entailed some discussion of the nature of the problem for government action. The 1931 census, the Franchise Committee, and the provincial authorities all discussed the matter at length. They came up with somewhat different lists, which were revised more than once before being finalized in 1935.

The Scheduled Castes were to be the Untouchable Hindu castes, and these were defined as "castes, contact with whom entails purification on the part of high caste Hindus."<sup>2</sup> The Census Commissioner, J. H. Hutton, set forth nine criteria to determine which castes were to be scheduled.<sup>3</sup> The most important criterion, he said, was whether the caste suffered (1) civil disabilities like denial of access to roads, wells or schools.

Five more were religious and social criteria: whether the caste

- (2) caused pollution by touch or proximity;
- (3) Denied access to the interior of ordinary Hindu temples;
- (4) Was denied the services of "clean Brahmans"; or
- (5) The services of the same barbers, etc., who served high caste Hindus;
- (6) This subject to the rules concerning the acceptance of water these six criteria was meant to include castes; the remaining three were meant to exclude them: the caste was not to be scheduled if
- (7) An educated member was treated as a social equal by a high caste man of the same education; or if it was depressed only because of its
- (8) Occupation
- (9) Ignorance, illiteracy or poverty, "and but for that would be subject to no social disability

### **The Present Situation**

Since Independence, Gandhi's view of the role of government has been discarded. The government not only can afford to lead in matters of reform, but it is also obligated to. And it has done so through several Constitutional provisions and the very thoroughgoing Untouchability (Offences) Act of 1955. Government, in fact, is so far in the lead that the Act to date has had little effect. Only 2,900 cases were registered under it during its first six years, and of these, little more than 600 resulted in convictions; most of the rest were either compounded or pending.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi's view that the reform work should go on outside the government now takes the form of official subsidies to voluntary agencies. Educated public opinion is not particularly concerned with Scheduled Caste matters.

No doubt ritual and secular status relationships among castes can become local issues of some intensity, but these aspects of the problems of the Scheduled Castes today cannot be said to be important public issues. Both by design and by default, then, most of the responsibility today is assigned to the government. The radical departure from the British and Gandhian policies just mentioned is the only major change in policy since Independence. It has not resulted in a shift in the overall distribution of official action programs, however, because of the considerable expansion in other fields. The main areas of growth by kind of program are in economic, housing and other welfare measures. But most of these are quite small in size and so variable in detail that they are difficult to assess in the aggregate. In operation, the three main concerns of the protective discrimination policy are still education, government jobs and political representation.

By all accounts, educational progress has been substantial. No comprehensive figures on educational enrollment are at hand, but such data as do exist indicate a considerable increase. While apparently not more than 1% of the Scheduled Caste population receives Scheduled Caste educational benefits under the Plan in any one year, others receive such benefits under non-plan programs, and still others, an increasing proportion, do so under systems where no caste criterion is operative. There is no information on their relative distribution, so it is impossible to say just how important the protective discrimination policy is in education today.

In government jobs, the picture is much less sanguine. The only quotas that are filled are at the Class IV level (attendants, peons). In the Central Services, the Scheduled Castes hold only 1.3% of Class I (senior administrative) posts, 3% of Class II (other administrative) posts, and 8% of the Class III (clerical) posts.<sup>12</sup> The picture in the State Government Services is no better. Reportedly, Scheduled Caste candidates often pass the written qualifying exams and then fail the oral personality test, where they may perhaps still be suffering from those very class differentials which the policy of reservations was designed to overcome. In any case, it will obviously be a long time before their representation in the upper echelons of the administration begins to approach their 15% of the population. On this, in turn, depends much of their resistance or receptivity to the idea of doing away with the system of protective discrimination.

The Scheduled Castes account for one-seventh of the electorate. Their geographical distribution is such that in no Lok Sabha constituency do they form more than a fourth of the voters, and at the Legislative Assembly level, it is only in a few urban constituencies that their percentage goes much higher than that. Even in some reserved constituencies, it drops below 10%. Obviously, then, Scheduled Caste candidates are dependent on non-Scheduled Caste voters for their election, and this is a far more important political fact than any dependence which may occasionally exist the other way around. Some cynics even aver that it has proved more convenient for the Congress Party to buy Scheduled Caste candidates than to win Scheduled Caste votes. Nevertheless, Congress has tended to run stronger in the reserved than the unreserved seats.

Under the double-member system of the first two elections, in the double-member constituencies alone, Congress won about equal numbers of reserved and unreserved seats. In fact, the two winning candidates were usually of the same party, whether Congress or some other party. The voting system was designed to favour the Scheduled

Caste candidates in the hope that they might be able to win some of the general seats as well. Once in a while, this did happen and they got both seats, but very rarely.

## CONCLUSIONS

I have two observations to make concerning the problems and prospects of high policy. First, in discussing the definition process, I showed that the Scheduled Castes were defined on the basis of their untouchability but not because of it. Then and now, they are defined on one basis and dealt with, primarily, on another. It might be objected that this makes very little difference since one comes up with the same people either way. It is, in fact, a rather artificial distinction, so long as they are the same people. But the policy is intended to break just that correlation and becomes unfair precisely as it becomes successful.

Moreover, even today the distinction is by no means academic for the Buddhists. For them, it is a real one as regards both their self-image and their case for special benefits. Almost all the converts to Buddhism came from the Scheduled Castes (mainly Mahars under Dr. Ambedkar's inspiration). Upon conversion they ceased to be Scheduled; they lost the benefits if their conversion became known unless the State governments made special provision for them as Other Backward Classes or "former Scheduled Caste" persons. If they had a case for protective discrimination before conversion, they still have it now, especially by the secular ad hoc criteria so often applied by the back door in originally listing the Scheduled Castes. That they want to receive benefits as Buddhists rather than as another Scheduled Caste, and that they so often vote for opposition (Republican Party) candidates, has not helped their case any on a practical level. But both for them and for the logic of high policy itself, the dilemma is a real one.

Second, I have indicated that while there is a case in support of the view that all the special measures of the government are, directly or indirectly, means to the removal of untouchability, it would probably be more accurate, on the basis of other portions of that same public rhetoric and a look at what the government has done, to turn it the other way around and say that efforts to remove untouchability are but one of the means the government has adopted to advance the general secular welfare of the Scheduled Castes. Here again, it might be objected that it makes very little difference what one calls the end of the means if the government does the same thing either way. At a pragmatic level, this is quite true. The policy issue arises when one recognizes that the structure of special benefits is by definition temporary and when one attempts to cope with ending it.

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