

## **Caste System and Social Equality in Modern India**

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### **Abstract**

The caste system has been one of the most significant social institutions in Indian society for centuries. It has historically determined an individual's social status, occupation, marriage relations, and access to social and economic opportunities. Although the Indian Constitution guarantees equality and prohibits caste-based discrimination, the influence of caste continues to shape social, political, and economic life in modern India. This paper examines the historical development of the caste system and analyses its impact on social equality in contemporary Indian society. The study explores how caste hierarchy evolved from the traditional Varna system into a rigid social structure that created inequality and exclusion among different social groups. The paper further discusses the role of social reformers such as Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, Mahatma Gandhi, and Periyar in challenging caste discrimination and promoting social justice. Special attention is given to constitutional provisions, reservation policies, and welfare programmes introduced by the Indian government to uplift Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The study also highlights the persistence of caste-based discrimination in areas such as education, employment, politics, marriage, and access to resources despite rapid urbanisation and modernisation.

**Keywords:** Caste System, Social Equality, Social Justice, Reservation, Dalit Rights, Discrimination, Indian Society, Social Change, Modernisation, Constitution of India

### **1. Introduction**

The caste system is one of the oldest and most complex forms of social stratification in the world. In India, caste has historically played a significant role in determining an individual's social position, occupation, lifestyle, and interpersonal relations. Traditionally, Indian society was divided into different social groups based on birth, occupation, and religious beliefs. Over time, this division became rigid and hierarchical, resulting in unequal distribution of power, resources, and opportunities among various communities. The caste system not only influenced social organisation but also shaped cultural practices, political structures, and economic conditions in Indian society.

The concept of caste is closely associated with the Varna system mentioned in ancient Hindu scriptures. The Varna system classified society into four major categories—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—while those considered outside the Varna structure were treated as “untouchables” and subjected to severe discrimination. Gradually, this broad classification evolved into the Jati system, which consisted of thousands of hereditary caste groups with fixed occupations and social restrictions. The principles of purity and pollution further strengthened caste hierarchy and social exclusion.

In modern India, the caste system has undergone significant transformation due to industrialisation, urbanisation, education, democratic politics, and constitutional reforms. After independence, the Constitution of India guaranteed equality before law and abolished untouchability through Article 17. Various welfare measures, reservation policies, and social justice programmes were introduced to improve the conditions of marginalised communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Despite these efforts, caste-based inequality and discrimination continue to exist in many forms, particularly in rural areas, educational institutions, workplaces, and political systems.

The issue of social equality is central to the development of a democratic and inclusive society. Social equality refers to a condition in which all individuals enjoy equal rights, opportunities, dignity, and access to resources regardless of caste, religion, gender, or economic background. In India, achieving social equality remains a major challenge because caste identity continues to influence social relationships and institutional structures. Caste-based violence, exclusion, and prejudice still affect millions of people, especially those belonging to historically disadvantaged communities.

This paper aims to examine the relationship between the caste system and social equality in modern India from a sociological perspective. It analyses the historical origins of caste, the role of social reform movements, constitutional provisions, and the changing nature of caste in contemporary society. The study also explores how modernisation and globalisation have influenced caste relations and social mobility.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To understand the historical development of the caste system in India.
- To examine the impact of caste on social equality and social relations.
- To analyse constitutional provisions and government policies related to caste-based equality.
- To study the changing nature of caste in modern Indian society.
- To evaluate the role of education, urbanisation, and modernisation in reducing caste discrimination.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is based on secondary sources of data, including books, research articles, government reports, census data, journals, newspapers, and online academic resources. A sociological and analytical approach has been used to understand the relationship between caste and social equality in India.

Overall, the study highlights that although India has achieved progress in legal and democratic terms, the challenge of eliminating caste-based inequality still remains. Therefore, continuous social reform, awareness, and inclusive policies are necessary for building an equal and just society.

## **2. Historical Development of the Caste System in India**

The caste system in India has a long historical background that has deeply influenced the social structure of the country. It developed gradually over centuries through religious beliefs, occupational divisions, social customs, and political changes. The system created a rigid hierarchy in society in which people were placed into different social groups based on birth rather than individual ability or achievement. Understanding the historical evolution of the caste system is essential for analysing its impact on social equality in modern India.

### **Origin of the Varna System**

The roots of the caste system can be traced to the ancient Varna system mentioned in Vedic literature. According to traditional Hindu texts, society was divided into four major Varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The Brahmins were associated with religious duties and education, the Kshatriyas with warfare and administration, the Vaishyas with trade and agriculture, and the Shudras with service-oriented occupations. People who fell outside this structure were treated as “untouchables” and faced severe social discrimination.

Initially, the Varna system was believed to be based more on occupation and qualities rather than birth. However, over time it became hereditary and rigid. Social mobility gradually declined, and individuals were forced to follow the occupations and social status assigned to their caste by birth. This rigidity laid the foundation for caste-based inequality and exclusion in Indian society.

### **Emergence of the Jati System**

As Indian society expanded and became more complex, the Varna system transformed into the Jati system. Jati refers to numerous sub-castes or community groups that were organised around occupation, region, customs, and kinship. Unlike the four-fold Varna division, the Jati system included thousands of caste groups with strict social rules.

Each caste had fixed occupations, social responsibilities, and restrictions regarding marriage, food habits, and interaction with other castes. Endogamy, or marriage within one’s caste, became an important feature of the caste system. The ideas of purity and pollution further strengthened social separation between upper and lower castes. Lower castes and untouchables were denied access to temples, education, public resources, and social participation.

### **Caste During the Medieval Period**

During the medieval period, caste divisions became more rigid and institutionalised. Religious practices, feudal structures, and local customs strengthened caste hierarchy. Many lower caste communities continued to face discrimination and exploitation in social and economic life. However, several Bhakti and Sufi saints challenged caste discrimination and promoted equality and human dignity.

Reformers such as Kabir, Ravidas, Guru Nanak, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu criticised untouchability and emphasised devotion, humanity, and spiritual equality over caste identity. Their teachings created social awareness and encouraged resistance against rigid caste

practices. Despite these efforts, caste hierarchy continued to dominate Indian society during the medieval era.

### **Impact of British Rule on the Caste System**

The British colonial administration had a significant impact on the caste system in India. Through census operations, administrative classification, and legal policies, the British government formally documented and categorised castes. This process often strengthened caste identities because communities began to organise themselves politically and socially according to caste categories.

The British introduced modern education, railways, industrialisation, and legal reforms, which indirectly weakened some traditional caste barriers. At the same time, colonial policies sometimes reinforced social divisions for administrative convenience. The emergence of new occupations and urban centres allowed limited social mobility, but caste-based discrimination largely remained intact.

### **Role of Social Reformers and Movements**

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed major social reform movements against caste discrimination and untouchability. Reformers such as Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Narayana Guru, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr B.R. Ambedkar played a crucial role in promoting social equality and justice.

Jyotirao Phule criticised Brahmanical dominance and worked for the education of lower castes and women. Periyar launched the Self-Respect Movement in South India to challenge caste hierarchy and social oppression. Mahatma Gandhi advocated for the upliftment of “Harijans” and promoted social harmony, although his approach differed from that of Dr Ambedkar.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar emerged as the most influential leader against caste discrimination. He strongly criticised the caste system and untouchability and demanded equal rights for oppressed communities. Ambedkar believed that social equality could only be achieved through education, political representation, and legal protection. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, he ensured the inclusion of provisions related to equality, justice, and affirmative action for marginalised communities.

### **Historical Legacy and Modern Relevance**

The historical development of the caste system has left a deep impact on Indian society. Although constitutional reforms and modernisation have challenged many traditional practices, caste identity still influences social relations, political participation, marriage patterns, and access to opportunities. Historical discrimination has created long-term inequalities that continue to affect marginalised communities in modern India.

### **3. Constitutional Provisions and Government Policies for Social Equality**

After independence, India adopted a democratic Constitution that aimed to establish justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity among all citizens. The makers of the Constitution recognised that centuries of caste-based discrimination and social exclusion had created deep inequalities

in Indian society. Therefore, special constitutional provisions and welfare policies were introduced to protect the rights of marginalised communities and promote social equality. These measures mainly focused on Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), who had historically faced social, educational, and economic disadvantages.

### **Constitutional Vision of Equality**

The Constitution of India guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws to all citizens under Article 14. This principle forms the foundation of social justice in Indian democracy. Articles 15 and 16 prohibit discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, race, sex, or place of birth. These Articles also allow the state to make special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes to ensure equal opportunities in education and employment.

One of the most important constitutional provisions related to caste equality is Article 17, which abolishes untouchability and declares its practice a punishable offence. This provision aimed to end centuries of social exclusion and humiliation faced by Dalits and lower castes. The Constitution also provides legal safeguards against exploitation and discrimination through various laws and judicial mechanisms.

The Directive Principles of State Policy further encourage the state to promote welfare, reduce inequality, and protect weaker sections of society. These principles reflect the commitment of the Indian state towards building an inclusive and egalitarian society.

### **Reservation Policy and Affirmative Action**

Reservation, also known as affirmative action, is one of the most significant policies introduced to achieve social equality in India. Reservation provides representation and opportunities to historically disadvantaged communities in education, government jobs, and political institutions.

Seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes in educational institutions, public sector employment, and legislative bodies such as Parliament and State Assemblies. The objective of reservation is not merely economic upliftment but also social empowerment and representation in decision-making processes.

Reservation policies have enabled many individuals from marginalised communities to gain access to higher education, administrative positions, and professional careers. It has contributed to the emergence of a new educated middle class among Dalits and backward communities. However, reservation has also remained a subject of political and social debate. Critics argue that it sometimes leads to social division and demands for caste-based benefits by other communities, while supporters consider it necessary for correcting historical injustice and ensuring equality of opportunity.

### **Laws and Legal Protections Against Caste Discrimination**

Several laws have been enacted to prevent caste-based discrimination and violence. The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 was introduced to enforce Article 17 and punish practices related to untouchability. Later, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of

Atrocities) Act, 1989 was enacted to provide stronger protection against caste-based violence, humiliation, and exploitation.

This Act defines various forms of atrocities against SCs and STs and provides legal remedies, special courts, and stricter punishments for offenders. Despite these laws, incidents of caste violence and discrimination continue to occur in many parts of India, especially in rural areas where traditional social structures remain strong. Weak implementation, lack of awareness, and social pressure often reduce the effectiveness of legal measures.

### **Government Welfare Programmes and Social Development**

The Indian government has launched various welfare schemes aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of disadvantaged communities. These programmes focus on education, employment, housing, health, skill development, and financial assistance. Scholarships, hostels, free coaching schemes, and educational support programmes have been introduced to encourage higher education among SCs, STs, and OBCs.

Economic development programmes such as rural employment schemes, entrepreneurship support, and self-employment initiatives have also been implemented to reduce poverty and social exclusion. Special financial institutions and commissions have been established to monitor the welfare and rights of marginalised groups.

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes play an important role in protecting constitutional rights and investigating cases of discrimination and injustice. These institutions advise the government on policy matters and promote awareness regarding social equality.

### **Challenges in Implementation**

Although constitutional provisions and government policies have contributed significantly to social change, many challenges still remain. Caste discrimination continues in subtle and direct forms in educational institutions, workplaces, villages, and urban communities. Social prejudice and traditional attitudes often prevent the effective implementation of equality measures.

Corruption, political interference, and lack of awareness among beneficiaries also reduce the impact of welfare programmes. In many rural areas, lower caste communities still face discrimination in access to temples, water sources, housing, and social participation. Furthermore, economic inequality and unequal educational opportunities continue to affect social mobility among marginalised groups.

Another challenge is the growing politicisation of caste identities. Political parties often use caste divisions for electoral gains, which sometimes strengthens social fragmentation rather than promoting equality and unity.

### **Significance of Constitutional Measures**

Despite these challenges, constitutional provisions and affirmative action policies have played a transformative role in Indian society. They have created opportunities for millions of people

who were historically excluded from education, employment, and political representation. The rise of Dalit literature, social movements, educated leadership, and increased political participation reflects the positive impact of these measures.

The constitutional framework of India represents an important effort to balance social justice with democratic values. However, true social equality cannot be achieved through legal measures alone. It also requires social awareness, educational reform, economic inclusion, and a collective commitment to human dignity and equality.

#### **4. Caste and Social Inequality in Contemporary India**

Despite constitutional safeguards, democratic governance, and rapid economic development, caste continues to influence social relations and opportunities in contemporary India. Although modernisation and urbanisation have weakened some traditional caste barriers, caste-based inequality and discrimination still exist in various forms. The impact of caste can be seen in education, employment, politics, marriage, economic conditions, and access to social resources. In many parts of India, especially rural areas, caste remains an important factor in determining social status and power relations.

##### **Persistence of Caste Discrimination**

One of the major challenges in modern India is the continued existence of caste discrimination. Lower caste communities, particularly Dalits, still face social exclusion, humiliation, and unequal treatment in many regions. Practices such as denying entry into temples, separate seating arrangements, restrictions on access to water sources, and discrimination in social interactions continue to occur despite legal prohibition.

In villages, caste hierarchy often shapes land ownership, occupation, and social authority. Upper caste groups usually hold greater economic and political power, while lower caste communities remain economically weaker and socially marginalised. Even in urban areas, caste identity influences housing opportunities, employment networks, and interpersonal relationships.

Although untouchability has officially been abolished, its social forms still survive indirectly in many places. This shows that legal reforms alone are insufficient to eliminate deeply rooted social attitudes and prejudices.

##### **Economic Inequality and Occupational Division**

Caste and economic inequality are closely connected in Indian society. Historically disadvantaged communities often have limited access to land, quality education, healthcare, and stable employment opportunities. Many Dalit and backward caste families continue to work in low-paying and insecure occupations.

Traditional caste-based occupations such as manual scavenging, sanitation work, and bonded labour have historically been associated with lower caste groups. Although laws have banned manual scavenging, the practice still exists in some regions due to poverty, lack of alternative employment, and social discrimination.

Economic liberalisation and industrialisation have created new opportunities for social mobility, but unequal access to resources and education prevents many marginalised groups from benefiting equally from economic growth. As a result, social inequality continues across generations.

### **Caste and Education**

Education is considered one of the most important tools for achieving social equality. However, caste-based inequality remains visible in the educational system. Students from marginalised communities often face discrimination, social isolation, and lack of institutional support. In some cases, caste prejudice affects classroom interactions, hostel life, and access to educational resources.

Government scholarship schemes, reservations, and educational welfare programmes have improved literacy and higher education participation among SCs, STs, and OBCs. Many individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds have entered professional fields such as administration, medicine, engineering, and academia. Nevertheless, dropout rates, poor school infrastructure, and unequal access to quality education continue to affect marginalised communities, especially in rural areas.

The issue of caste discrimination in educational institutions has also received national attention through incidents of student harassment and social exclusion. Such cases highlight the need for inclusive educational environments and greater sensitivity towards social equality.

### **Caste and Politics**

Caste plays a significant role in Indian politics. Political parties often mobilise voters on the basis of caste identity and community interests. In many states, caste-based political alliances influence election results and leadership structures. While democratic politics has provided representation to historically marginalised groups, it has also strengthened caste consciousness in some situations.

The rise of Dalit and backward caste political movements has given oppressed communities a stronger voice in public life. Leaders such as Kanshi Ram and Mayawati brought Dalit issues into mainstream politics and challenged traditional upper caste dominance. Political participation has increased awareness regarding rights, dignity, and social justice among marginalised communities.

However, caste-based politics sometimes creates social polarisation and identity conflicts. Instead of focusing solely on development and national unity, political competition based on caste can reinforce social divisions.

### **Caste-Based Violence and Social Exclusion**

Caste-based violence remains a serious issue in contemporary India. Cases of honour killings, social boycotts, sexual violence against Dalit women, and attacks on lower caste communities continue to be reported from different parts of the country. Such violence is often linked to resistance against social mobility, inter-caste marriage, land disputes, and challenges to traditional power structures.

Dalit women face double discrimination due to both caste and gender. They are more vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and economic insecurity. This intersection of caste and gender inequality highlights the complexity of social discrimination in India.

Social exclusion also affects access to healthcare, housing, public services, and justice. Fear of discrimination often discourages victims from reporting crimes or seeking legal help.

### **Urbanisation and Changing Social Relations**

Urbanisation and migration have changed the nature of caste relations to some extent. In cities, people from different castes interact more frequently in workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces. Professional identity and economic status have become increasingly important in social life. Inter-caste friendships and marriages are also gradually increasing among educated urban youth.

However, caste has not completely disappeared from urban society. Matrimonial advertisements, political networks, housing discrimination, and community organisations often continue to reflect caste identity. Social media and digital platforms have also become spaces where caste identities are both challenged and reinforced.

Thus, modernisation has transformed caste practices but has not entirely removed caste consciousness from Indian society.

### **Need for Social Awareness and Inclusion**

The persistence of caste inequality in modern India demonstrates that social transformation requires more than constitutional laws and economic development. Social awareness, ethical education, and inclusive policies are necessary to challenge caste prejudice and promote equality. Civil society organisations, educational institutions, media, and youth movements can play an important role in creating a more just and inclusive society.

True social equality can only be achieved when every individual is treated with dignity and respect regardless of caste background. Therefore, continuous efforts are needed to eliminate discrimination and strengthen the values of justice, equality, and human rights in Indian society.

## **5. Modernisation, Globalisation and Changing Nature of Caste**

Indian society has experienced major social, economic, and cultural transformations after independence due to modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, education, and globalisation. These processes have significantly influenced the traditional caste system and altered social relations in many ways. While caste continues to remain an important aspect of Indian society, its form and functions have changed over time. In modern India, caste is no longer limited only to traditional occupations and village-based social hierarchy; it has also become connected with politics, education, economic opportunities, and identity-based movements.

### **Impact of Modernisation on the Caste System**

Modernisation refers to the process through which societies move from traditional structures to more modern and rational systems based on equality, science, and democratic values. In

India, modernisation has weakened many rigid aspects of the caste system. Industrialisation and urbanisation created new occupations and employment opportunities that were not linked to hereditary caste roles. People from different caste backgrounds began working together in factories, offices, schools, and public institutions.

Education has also played a transformative role in reducing caste barriers. Access to schools, colleges, and universities has increased awareness regarding equality, constitutional rights, and social justice. Educated individuals are more likely to challenge discriminatory practices and support democratic values. As a result, many traditional beliefs regarding purity, pollution, and untouchability have gradually weakened, especially in urban areas.

However, modernisation has not completely removed caste identity. In many cases, caste has adapted itself to modern conditions rather than disappearing entirely. Social networks, marriage relations, and political affiliations often continue to be influenced by caste considerations.

### **Urbanisation and Social Mobility**

Urbanisation has created opportunities for social mobility among marginalised communities. Migration from villages to cities has reduced the direct control of traditional caste-based social structures. In urban environments, professional skills, educational qualifications, and economic status often become more important than caste identity.

Many individuals from lower caste backgrounds have entered middle-class professions through education and reservation policies. Government jobs, private sector employment, and entrepreneurship have improved the socio-economic status of several marginalised groups. Urban living also increases interaction among different communities, which can reduce social distance and prejudice.

Despite these positive changes, caste discrimination still exists in urban society in subtle forms. Housing discrimination, workplace bias, and caste-based matrimonial preferences continue to reflect the persistence of caste consciousness. Thus, urbanisation has transformed caste relations but has not entirely eliminated caste-based inequality.

### **Role of Globalisation**

Globalisation has connected India more closely with the global economy, culture, technology, and communication systems. Economic liberalisation after 1991 created new employment opportunities in information technology, business, education, and service sectors. These changes contributed to the emergence of a new middle class that included people from different caste backgrounds.

Exposure to global ideas of democracy, human rights, and equality has encouraged social awareness and criticism of discriminatory practices. Social media platforms and digital communication have provided marginalised communities with new spaces for expression, activism, and resistance. Dalit writers, activists, and organisations have increasingly used digital media to raise awareness about caste discrimination and social justice issues.

At the same time, globalisation has also produced new forms of inequality. Access to quality education, digital technology, and economic opportunities remains unequal among different

social groups. Communities that are already socially and economically disadvantaged often struggle to benefit equally from global economic growth. Therefore, caste and class inequalities sometimes combine to create new forms of exclusion in modern society.

### **Caste and Democratic Politics**

In contemporary India, caste has become closely linked with democratic politics. Political participation and electoral competition have increased the political awareness of backward and marginalised communities. Various caste-based organisations and political parties represent the interests of specific social groups and demand greater social justice and representation.

The implementation of reservation policies in education, employment, and political institutions has strengthened the participation of lower caste communities in governance and administration. This has challenged traditional upper caste dominance and created new leadership among Dalits, OBCs, and other marginalised groups.

However, caste-based politics has both positive and negative consequences. On one hand, it provides representation and empowerment to disadvantaged communities. On the other hand, excessive focus on caste identity in politics can deepen social divisions and encourage vote-bank politics. Political mobilisation based on caste sometimes shifts attention away from broader issues such as economic development, education, healthcare, and national integration.

### **Inter-Caste Marriage and Changing Youth Attitudes**

One of the most visible signs of social change in modern India is the gradual increase in inter-caste marriages, particularly among educated urban youth. Exposure to modern education, media, and individualistic values has encouraged some young people to challenge traditional caste restrictions related to marriage and social interaction.

Inter-caste marriages promote social integration and weaken rigid caste boundaries. The Indian government has also introduced incentives and legal protection schemes to encourage such marriages. However, inter-caste couples still face social resistance, family pressure, and even violence in some regions. Honour killings and social boycotts reveal that traditional caste attitudes remain deeply rooted in many communities.

The younger generation generally shows greater acceptance of equality and social inclusion compared to older generations. Nevertheless, complete transformation requires continuous social awareness and institutional support.

### **Continuity and Change in the Caste System**

The caste system in modern India reflects both continuity and change. Traditional practices such as untouchability and hereditary occupations have weakened in many areas, yet caste identity continues to influence social, economic, and political life. Rather than disappearing completely, caste has adapted itself to new democratic and economic conditions.

In rural areas, caste hierarchy still strongly affects land ownership, marriage relations, and local power structures. In urban areas, caste often appears in more indirect forms through social

networks, educational access, and political mobilisation. Therefore, caste remains a dynamic social institution that continues to evolve with changing social conditions.

### **Towards an Inclusive Society**

Modernisation and globalisation have created opportunities for greater equality and social mobility in India, but significant challenges still remain. Achieving genuine social equality requires not only economic growth but also social reform, quality education, ethical awareness, and equal access to opportunities for all communities.

The values of democracy, secularism, human dignity, and constitutional morality must be strengthened to reduce caste prejudice and discrimination. Civil society organisations, educational institutions, media, and youth movements can play an important role in promoting social harmony and inclusion.

Thus, the changing nature of caste in modern India demonstrates that while society has progressed in many ways, the struggle for equality and social justice continues.

### **6. Conclusion**

The caste system has been one of the most influential social institutions in Indian society for centuries. It shaped social hierarchy, occupational structure, cultural practices, and interpersonal relations in both historical and modern contexts. Although the system originated as a form of social organisation, over time it became rigid and hereditary, leading to discrimination, inequality, and exclusion of large sections of society. Lower caste communities, especially Dalits and other marginalised groups, suffered social humiliation, economic exploitation, and denial of basic human rights for generations.

The study reveals that independent India made serious efforts to establish social equality through constitutional provisions, legal reforms, reservation policies, and welfare programmes. The Constitution of India guaranteed equality before law, abolished untouchability, and introduced affirmative action measures for historically disadvantaged communities. These measures helped improve educational opportunities, political representation, and socio-economic mobility among Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The rise of educated Dalit leadership, social movements, and increased participation in democratic institutions reflects the positive impact of these reforms.

However, despite constitutional safeguards and economic development, caste-based inequality continues to exist in contemporary India. Discrimination in education, employment, housing, marriage, and social interaction remains visible in many regions. Caste-based violence, honour killings, social exclusion, and unequal access to resources demonstrate that traditional prejudices are still deeply rooted in society. In rural areas, caste hierarchy continues to influence land ownership, political authority, and social status, while in urban areas caste identity often appears in indirect forms such as social networking, matrimonial preferences, and political mobilisation.

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