



Reimagining the National Commission for Scheduled Castes

Context:

- In 2020, new thoughts and new actions are needed by National Commission for Scheduled Castes, to advance the socio-economic empowerment of the Dalits.

What is National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)?

- The NCSC is a constitutional body that works to safeguard the interests of the scheduled castes in India. Article 338 of the constitution of India deals with this commission.
- It seeks to offer the SC community protection from discrimination and exploitation, as well as providing facilities to uplift the SC community.
- Some of the functions of NCSC include:
 1. Enquiring into complaints relating to the deprivation of the rights and safeguards of the SCs.
 2. Monitoring and investigating all issues concerning the safeguards provided for the SCs under the constitution.
 3. Taking part in and advising the central or state governments with respect to the planning of socio-economic development of the SCs.
 4. Regular reporting to the President of the country on the implementation of these safeguards.
- Initially, the constitution provided for the appointment of a Special Officer under Article 338. This special officer was designated as the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- The 46th Amendment to the constitution replaced the one-member system with a multi-member National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe.





➤ The 89th Amendment in 2003 replaced this Commission with the following with effect from 2004:

1. National Commission for Scheduled Castes
2. National Commission for Scheduled Tribes

What are the steps that can be taken by the NCSC?

Strengthen the legal and judicial protection under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act:

- There is a need to develop **SOPs for filing and investigating cases** under relevant laws and make them available in all languages at all police stations.
- There is also a need to reward prosecutors who succeed in getting convictions in cases charged under the SC/ST Act.
- There should be **online reporting** and tracking of crimes, irrespective of jurisdiction.
- Enhanced training and capacity building of judges, lawyers, and policemen, so that they are sensitive to issues faced by SCs.
- Creating **internal structures** within government organisations to respond to complaints — just like internal complaints committees for sexual harassment.

To make existing government efforts more effective and participatory:

- Each ministry is supposed to set aside 15% of its spending in a Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCP), but often their outcomes are insignificant.
- NCSC should work with legislators to identify four or five priorities across all government schemes and reorient all spending (SCP) around those priorities.
- There is also a need to track the output of SCPs every quarter/month through a dashboard, just as the Niti Aayog tracks development in the “Aspirational Districts”.

Incentivising Good Work:

- There can be a monthly recognition and reward for departments that do the best in improving the status of SCs.
- There can also be ranking of states for their innovation, effectiveness, and impact in uplifting the socio-economic status of SCs— just as cities are ranked for cleanliness.

Engaging with Civil Society:

- Social change is catalysed through civil society, corporations, and communities.
- For that the Commission can create a platform for structured engagement with civil society groups working on Dalit issues.



- There is a need for NCSC to engage with young representatives of SCs as their aspirations would be different from previous generations.
- NCSC can also help create a network of Scheduled Caste alumni of IIMs and IITs and encourage them to suggest and implement ideas within and around their own organisations that advance economic empowerment of Dalits.

Facilitating economic empowerment and entrepreneurship:

- NCS needs to strengthen the scheme of reservations in public sector procurement.
- NCSC should promote subsidised and short-term management training courses for SC entrepreneurs who want to expand and learn new skills.
- Members of Scheduled Castes are not usually landowners or agriculturists. So they need help in integrating and competing with local and other markets which can be done by NCSC through mentoring and other non-financial support.

Cultural advancement of Dalits:

- Jobs and schemes and policing are not the only things to improve the social status of Scheduled CasSCs.
- Cultural advancement of Dalits using new and old media is needed to break stereotypes regarding SCs.
- NCSC can reward film-makers/ photographers/ artists whose works reflect Dalit concerns or Dalit pride.
- NCSC can also work with I&B Ministry to fund a TV series that portrays the challenges that Dalits face in a sensitive and engaging way.

Conclusion:

Tasks of the National Commission for SCs should be reimaged to make it a transformative agency for the Dalit community.