

Association of Academics for Social Justice
Inaugural Conference on
Intergroup Inequality in Indian Society:
Magnitude, Nature, Sources, Policies, and the Movement

The Indian society is highly diversified in social, cultural, and religious aspect of human life. However this diversity also coincide with disparity in social and economic aspect of life, which is closely associated with group's identity like caste, ethnicity, religion, gender and others forms of identity .Some social groups like the untouchables, other backward castes, tribals, religious minorities and women suffer from lack of civil, political , economic , religious , social and cultural rights in various degrees. Among the social institutions, however, the caste system as a social organization of Hindus has generated high level of systemic inequality across the caste groups, due to unequally graded entitlement of economic, civil, political and cultural/religious rights. The conversion of caste Hindus to other religions has also carried the caste system in this religion and persists in direct forms. The untouchables who converted in other religion like Sikhism, Christianity, Islam and other sects in search of equal rights and status also faced discrimination in the converted religion.The former untouchables who are placed at the bottom of caste hierarchy suffered the most from the unjust assignment of rights and low social status.. The denial of basic human rights to the ex-untouchables has had a crippling effect on their living condition. The other backward castes also suffered from caste discrimination in some forms and deprivation. So do the Hindu women,who also suffered from the selective denial of rights under norms of caste system.

Indian State has recognised the problem of intergroup inequality in our society based on group identity of caste, tribe, religion and gender. Eventually the Constitution in 1950 recognized the problem arising out of groups identity, particularly the caste ,tribal and gender inequality, including the problem of religious minorities and made social justice (social, economic and political), liberty, equality, and fraternity as the founding principle of State governance, clearly overturning the inequality associated with caste system . It promises equal rights to all citizens. Article 14 assures equality before the law and equal protection of law. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of caste, religion, race, sex, or place of birth, by the State and in use of services supplied by private individual for public use, and /or facilities maintained wholly or partly out of State funds and dedicated to the use of the general public. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, and states that there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment under the State, and no discrimination in employment or office under the State. Article 17 abolishes untouchability and its practice in any form is forbidden and made punishable in law. Moreover, the Constitution in Article 46, the Directive Principles of State Policy, makes it obligatory for the State to enact laws and frame policies to enable the citizens to use these (fundamental) rights in practice. In case of the Scheduled castes and

Tribes it states: 'The State is required to protect the Scheduled Caste (ex-untouchables) and Scheduled Tribes (indigenous people) from social injustices and all forms of exploitation.'

To give effect to the provision of non-discrimination, the Indian Government, in 1955, enacted the Untouchability (Offences) Act on May 8, 1955 (enforced on June 1, 1955), which was renamed as 'Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, in 1979. Thirty-four years later, another law namely 'The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, was enacted in 1989. Similar Act has been passed to prevent gender discrimination. The Indian Government also enacted a reservation policy to ensure fair share to the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes/Other backward castes in legislature, public employment and educational institutions in 1950. With some modification similar legal safeguards and affirmative action policies in direct or indirect form are developed for the women. The Constitution also made special provisions to safeguard the rights of religious minorities such as Jains, Christians, Muslim, Buddhist and others.

Persistence of Discrimination and Inequalities

Over a period of time, there has been considerable erosion in the institution of Caste and untouchability, and gender discrimination-rooted in social structure. The situation of the ex-untouchables and other backward castes has improved considerably, so did the situation of women. However, although the caste system has weakened in several spheres, it continues to retain some of its worst features with denial of equal rights, as it carries forward the legacy of discrimination and maintains graded inter-caste and gender inequality even today in economic, civil and political, social, cultural religious spheres. The indicators of human development or economic wellbeing, like per capita income, poverty, malnutrition, education, housing and assets ownership, civil and political rights, religious and cultural rights reveal the evidence of persisting inter-caste inequalities and practice of caste discrimination and untouchability.

The ideology of castes and untouchability continues to influence and shape the behavior of higher castes which involve denial of equal rights in multiple spheres to the low castes. Official data for the period between 2001 to 2016, a total of 2,57,961 cases of discrimination were registered by the scheduled caste (SC) which comes to a yearly average of 16,123 cases per year under the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 and Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989.

The primary studies revealed the nature of discrimination in multiple spheres. The most comprehensive study of all India coverage relates to 2000 that includes five hundred villages from eleven states and other studies give evidence of caste discrimination and untouchability. These studies revealed that despite the law against caste discrimination and untouchability by the Constitution of India and despite the passage of numerous legislations classifying caste discrimination and untouchability in any spheres as a cognizable criminal offence and despite several affirmative measures to improve the socio-economic condition, the practices live on and even take a new form. Clearly caste discrimination is not a fast-fading remnant of our traditional ideology of caste and untouchability, but a persistent and flexible part of our contemporary reality that needs to be recognised and addressed. Casteism is thus a

predominant part of Indian life, Casteism itself has become internalized into the Indian conscience. It comes naturally and unknowably to the high castes.

Therefore we see that increasingly the issue of inter-group inequalities has come into sharp focus and acquired prominence in the policy discourse. Beside SC/ST/OBCs, other groups have also begun to demand group-based policies. These groups include several middle castes such as Maratha, Patel, Jat, and other sub-castes, women, and religious minorities like the Dalit Christians, Dalit Muslims, and low-income groups irrespective of their social identities. Some of them have sought reservation policies in public employment, some in legislatures, and some have asked for group specific policies for economic and educational empowerment.

The demand for the group-focused policies is enviable because in the Indian social context exclusion from opportunities is based on caste, gender and ethnicity with some communities suffering more from disadvantages, while others enjoy special rights and privileges. At the same time empirical evidence on the nature of group inequality is much less than the demands surrounding the issue. Therefore, policies are often developed with less information. Under political pressure the adoption of policies is given precedence over empirical evidence and theoretical justification. The policies are adopted with limited evidence; the zone of ignorance is too large, which gives rise to debate.

Therefore, the Association of Academic for Social Justice has decided to discuss the issue of “Inter group disparities” for the first time in some depth. Under this theme the conference will examine the magnitude of inter-group inequalities associated with caste, tribes, religion, gender and other social identities, look into the sources of group inequalities, provide justification for group-based policies based on empirical facts, assess the present policies, and finally suggest reforms in the present policies.

Social groups such as those comprising former or ex-untouchables (Dalits) and women have multiple dimensions to their problem of deprivation. There are hardly any aspects of their lives which are not regulated by the caste system and untouchability in an unequal manner. Their caste regulates social, cultural, religious, political, economic, and psychological aspects of their lives. Therefore, understanding of inter-group inequalities requires not only a multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary approach but also involvement and inputs from multiple disciplines in social sciences such as law and constitution, economics, political sciences, sociology/anthropology, philosophy, history, psychology, literature and visual arts, media (print, social, and films). These disciplines drawing from their respective theoretical and empirical knowledge need to provide insights into the problem of inter-group inequality using multi-disciplinary and cross disciplinary approach, tools and methodology. The multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary framework will enable us to theorize, examine, and innovate ways to reduce inter-group inequalities and oppression associated with caste, gender, and other forms of identity. The motive and goal are to bring forth a collective voice and wisdom to develop an approach and policies to reduce inter-group inequality and oppression.

This being the first systematic attempt to discuss the neglected theme of group inequality, this conference will first take up prime questions for discussion. It will draw insights from theories and empirical evidence from multiple disciplines on

- (a) the magnitude and nature of group inequality,
- (b) sources of persisting group inequality,
- (c) consequences in terms of unequal outcomes and
- (d) policies for minimizing group inequalities.

The invited papers, keynote addresses, and special lectures will bring forth rich theoretical and empirical evidence on persistence of inter-group inequality. A number of issues that will emerge from the discussion during the three-day academic exercise will likely throw up several other issues, which will be selectively taken up for detailed discussion in subsequent annual conferences .

In this conference the issue of inter-group inequality will be discussed by separate panels on the following eight themes.

(1) **Panel 1:**

Nature of Inter-group inequality in economic sphere: sources, consequences and policies

Under this theme we discuss group inequality in human development and human poverty estimated through human development index and human poverty index. Both these indices use indicators that include per capita income, poverty, life expectancy, malnutrition, and social needs such as health status, education, and housing. We divide these indicators in two parts:

- (a) group inequality in income and poverty: it will delve into employment and wealth ownership.
- (b) group inequality in social needs: It will focus on inter-group inequality in education, health, and housing.

(a) **Panel 1 (a)**

Intergroup inequality in income and poverty and its determinants such as ownership of wealth, land and enterprises/business and employment and discrimination

In this theme the purpose is to discuss the magnitude and nature of group (within and between group) economic inequality in income and poverty with a focus on disparities along castes, gender (intersectionalities pertaining to social identity and gender), tribal's and non-tribal's, and between religious minorities and majorities.

The papers will also discuss the causes of inter-group inequalities in terms of general economic factors, and discrimination faced by the lower caste groups in market and non-market institutions, and particularly examines discrimination in employment, wages, farming, and business which result in unequal outcomes. The papers will discuss the employment pattern, occupation as formal and informal workers, jobs and social security among various social groups.

Some papers will discuss the impact of depletion and degradation of common property resources on the access to these resources to marginalised groups including the differential impact of environmental climate change on these groups.

The papers are also expected to discuss the theories of economic discrimination in general and caste /gender in particular for gaining insights into the motives behind discrimination.

Under this theme, the panellists will also discuss the concept and method of measuring discrimination (mainly confined to gender and caste/tribe /religion interface).

Some papers are expected to focus on the issues of reservation and reparation, the debate on reservation policies, including lessons from theories of discrimination for designing policies to overcome market and non-market discriminations.

This theme will be taken up on all the three days of the conference through parallel sessions. We expect to have about 12 parallel sessions, two Keynote addresses and special lectures on this theme.

(b) Panel 1 (b)

Inter-group inequality in education, health, and housing, its sources, consequences and policies, privatisation of social need and discriminatory access

Under this theme we propose to discuss the magnitude and nature of inter-group inequality in social development, namely educational attainment, health status and housing.

In education, the papers will bring out inter-group inequality in education attainment at school and higher education level, group inequality in dropout rate, and in quality of education. The emerging issues of discrimination in schools and higher education institutions and their impact on academic performance and dropout rates will also be discussed in some detail.

The papers will examine the reasons for group inequality in education attainment and dropout rates as also access to quality education including the role of discrimination in low access and high dropout rates among the SCs and STs. The issue of unequal access to poor and the SC/ST/women/minorities due to privatization of higher education institutions (HEIs) will also be discussed. The papers will then evaluate the policies for school and higher education, including the New Education policy, 2020.

The role of reservation policy in HEIs and its impact and limitations will also be taken up.

In the housing sector, the issue of intergroup inequality in the quality of housing, bad and good housing, and slum housing will be discussed. The papers will also discuss the consequences of poor housing on the health and social life of the people living in bad houses and slums. The focus of the discussion will be on reasons for inequality in access to houses across caste, tribes, and religion. Among the causative factors there will be particular focus on discrimination in allocation of land for houses and in obtaining rented accommodation. The papers will also look into the persisting problem of residential segregation of Scheduled castes in rural areas, and the policies for housing for poor and discriminated groups.

In the health sector, the papers will examine inter-group inequality in health status with respect to caste, tribes, women and religion. The discussion would cover the health dimension at overall level and for children and women with focus on food security and nutrition, mortality, anaemia, and life expectancy, and other aspects. The panelists will also examine the economic and social reasons for group inequality in health status.

The neglected issue of discrimination in accessing health services and nutrition facilities in anganwadis, mid-day meal schemes and other food security and nutrition schemes both in public and private sector will be discussed. The papers will also make an assessment of the policies to improve the health status of the marginalised groups and explore ways to ensure non-discriminatory access to health services.

This theme will also run on all the three days of the conference through parallel sessions. It is expected to have about 12 parallel sessions (three sessions each for education, health and housing) and about three Keynote addresses and special lectures pertaining to the subject.

(2) **Panel 2**

Issues Related to Political Rights and Representation of Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women and Religious Minorities: Under-representation, nominal representation, consequences and assessment of present policies

Political rights are the rights exercised in the formation and administration of a government. These include the right to contest and vote in elections, to participate in governance as an elected representative, the right to join a political party; run for office; and participate freely in political rallies, events, or protests. Political rights are closely tied to citizenship rights.

The contemporary political issues of the scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, women and religious minorities and other marginalized communities relate to unequal access to political rights, and political representation in legislature and in executive, and these will form the focus of discussions under this theme.

The papers will discuss the dimension of unequal presence and participation of the SC/ST/Women /religious minorities in the political sphere, beside restrictions in one form or another on the right to vote, or the right to get elected, and represent in legislature and executive in effective ways.

The electoral politics is increasingly getting influenced by caste and religious considerations. This invariably results in majoritarian rule with communal-majority party or parties coming to power, thus posing danger to the equal political rights of caste, ethnic, and religious minorities. The papers will also discuss the caste and communal base of political democracy and examine how it undermines the interest of the SC/ST/ and religious minorities.

There is talk about replacing the parliamentary system by presidential system in our country. In fact in some states at the panchayat and municipality level the elections of the sarpanch and mayor are direct. A direct election shall invariably help to elect a sarpanch and mayor from the majority caste or religion. The panelists will examine the implication of such a development on the representation of scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, religious minorities and other marginalised communities.

The papers will also discuss the issue of under-representation of women and Muslims in central and state assemblies. Under this theme the papers will also discuss the effectiveness of political reservation through Joint Electorate, in electing 'genuinely active' representatives of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in various constituencies.

This session will run for three days through parallel session. During these three days we expect to have about 12 parallel sessions, (three sessions each for SC, ST women and religious minorities) and about three Keynote and special lectures on this theme.

(3) **Panel 3**

Issues related to unequal access to civil rights, citizenship and social status: Caste, untouchability, religious and gender discrimination

Civil rights are a significant set of rights that are designed to protect individuals from unfair treatment; these are rights of individuals to receive equal treatment (and to be free from unfair treatment or discrimination) in a number of settings – public facilities, education, employment, housing, public accommodations, and more. The State enacted the Untouchability Offence Act, 1955 (which was renamed as Protection of Civil rights Act in 1979) and SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 as legal safeguards against denial of equal civil Rights to the SC/ST. Similar Act is enacted to ensure equal rights to women.

The papers in this session will focus upon the changes in caste discrimination and untouchability and the progress made in providing equal civil rights access to SCs /STs. The papers will also examine the public spheres wherein positive changes have occurred on this count and where the caste discrimination still persists and the progress against it has been very slow.

Panelists will also look into the issue of residential and social segregation of Dalits in rural areas and possible measures towards their social integration. They will assess the process of 'sanskritization' and 'westernization' and also other social processes, which are generally neglected, such as conversion to Buddhism and to several other egalitarian ideologies and sects.

The papers will also discuss the nature of discrimination experienced by religious minorities, and Dalits who converted to Christianity, Sikhism and Islam, namely the Dalit Christians, Dalit Muslims and Sikhs. The session will also focus upon gender discrimination in relation to its intersectionality with caste, tribe, and religion.

(4) **Panel 4**

Philosophical traditions and history of movement for equality since ancient to present time

This session on Philosophy and History is intended to invite scholars of philosophy and historians to provide inputs from the discipline of philosophy and history in the discourse of struggle between two philosophical traditions -the one which favoured a society based on inequality and hierarchy, and the other which opposed it and supported and propagated the ideology of a society based on equality, liberty, and fraternity in ancient India and thereafter. Religion and social historians have used different approaches to interpret the historical development in India. Some historians, among whom Ambedkar finds a prominent place, look at Indian history as a struggle between two traditions, namely the Vedic Brahminical tradition which upholds a particular religious and social ideology that supported a society based on the principle of graded inequality. The other was Sramanic ideology that opposed the principle of graded hierarchy and supported a society based on the principle of equality and freedom. Buddha and his followers continuously opposed the Vedic Brahminical social structure. Indian history, according to Ambedkar, is mainly a history of struggle between the two cultures--one in support of inequality and the other in favour of equality. In Ambedkar's terminology the Indian history has been a process of revolution and counter revolution. While revolution refers to a philosophy and religious and social movement for equality and freedom, counter revolution refers to a philosophy and a socio-religious movement for an unequal society--unfreedom)

The panel discussions under this theme will therefore focus on the struggle between the Vedic Brahminical philosophical tradition supportive of inequality and the Sramanic and Buddhist philosophical tradition supportive of equality, liberty and fraternity. In this session, the papers will first analyse the social ideology of these two philosophical schools with a focus on caste and untouchability, and women. Secondly, the papers will trace the social movements supportive of revolution and that opposed to it -- counter-revolution. The papers on counter revolution will cover the ancient, medieval, and colonial periods, coming down to the contemporary times that Ambedkar had described as "counter revolution in its most aggressive form."

This theme will also run for all the three days of the conference through parallel sessions. About 12 parallel sessions are expected to be held along with presentation of three Keynote addresses and special lectures on this theme.

(5) **Panel 5**

Law and Constitution

Law as a phenomenon is not merely concerned with regulating social behavior. As a system of social regulation, it has been used both as an instrument of social oppression, and of social change. Therefore, law is not just about what it is but is also defined by the processes through which it has come. Furthermore, law has been historically used as an instrument of exclusion. Customs and social practices, which have the effect of law, subjugated several communities to oppression and discrimination. It is therefore necessary to question how law has been used as a system of exclusion. Equally important is to understand how the constitutional notion of law was envisaged to counter the exclusionary conception of law. Ambedkar made efforts to utilize this constitutional conception of law to make social discrimination a criminal act. It is significant to analyze to what extent the constitutional or egalitarian conception of law has been able to undo the effects of social exclusion. This is because constitutional frameworks face a challenge from societal norms of caste and inequality every day. In this context of contradiction between the laws and actual practice, the role of egalitarian economic and social structure needs to be recognized.

In summary, three main questions appear: 1) How has law been used as an instrument of exclusion? 2) How did the constitutional conception of law challenge the social systems of caste and discrimination? 3) What are limitations of legal solution? and (4) How will an egalitarian economic and social structure facilitate the access of civil, political and economic rights to the depressed classes? .

The sub-themes chosen under this main theme will address the following questions:

1) A set of papers will discuss the laws or legal framework related to the institution of caste and untouchability, and women's rights laid down by Hindu shastras and how discriminatory they have been in terms of denial of rights to the Scheduled castes and women resulting in massive inter-caste and gender inequalities between the SCs and high castes.

2) Why has the impact of the Untouchability Act, 1955 (renamed Protection of Civil Rights Act in 1979), and Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989 been limited among the laws which were developed as part of constitutional conception of law?

3) What are the other conditions necessary for effective outcomes from anti-discriminatory laws? How is the egalitarian economic structure and the social normative structure supportive of provision of equality and freedom necessary for structural change in caste and gender discrimination?

4) How did the administration, dominated by high castes, enforce the laws in a manner such that it preserved their interests and cause loss of less rights? In other words how the caste character of judiciary and the legal administration act in bias manner?

5) Has the caste bias crept into delivery of social justice by the judges and the lawyers?

The panelists will also deliberate on the limitations of laws against discrimination in educational institutions.

This theme will also be taken up on all the three days through parallel sessions. The organisers expect to have about 12 parallel sessions, and about three Keynote addresses and special lectures on this theme.

(6) Panel 6

Psychological issues related to institution of caste and untouchability

The discipline of Psychology has been at the forefront in examining societal inequality and oppression, and has developed an influential body of theory and research examining group processes and inter-group relations in multiple contexts. Psychology in India has also shown curiosity and interest in studying caste. However, psychological research on caste does not go beyond a few sporadic yet notable contributions. As a result, despite the availability of relevant theoretical and research frameworks, the psychological study of caste has remained on the periphery and has only received limited attention within the mainstream academic community and the public. The real question that the use of psychology should not be limited in efforts to understand and annihilate caste but should also include what sort of psychology helps or hinders those efforts.

Against this background, the Psychology panellists will attempt to bridge the theoretical and empirical gap between caste and psychology. Contributions will draw on theoretical and research foundations within Psychology to bring together emerging perspectives, offer novel insights into caste related cognition, emotion, and behaviour, and provide directions for future psychological research on caste. The sub-themes will include the following:

- (1) Potential of psychology to examine oppressive social structures;
- (2) Theoretical and methodological issues in psychological study of caste;
- (3) Development of caste consciousness among children and adults;
- (4) Prejudice and stereotyping in the caste context;
- (5) Psychological aspects of collective action and resistance against caste;
- (6) Development and expressions of hate against caste and religious groups;
- (7) Ethnic isolation and discrimination;
- (8) Caste-based stigma, humiliation and trauma: experience, impact and interventions;
- (9) Education and curriculum for psychology of caste;
- (10) Intersectional approach to psychological study of caste.

This theme will also be taken up on all the three days of the conference through parallel sessions. We expect to have about 12 parallel sessions, and about three Keynote addresses and special lectures on this theme.

(7) **Panel 7**

(a) **Literature and Visual Arts**

Among the social sciences and languages, it is literature that has contributed significantly towards capturing the nature and intensity of caste discrimination and untouchability and the reality of human experience of Dalit life. The “Dalit literature” in Marathi has not only inspired writers in other Indian languages but also attracted the attention of scholars across several countries in the world. The literary expression is a very powerful means to capture the innermost experiences of caste discrimination, untouchability and gender discrimination. Therefore, the panel on literature will discuss the issue of caste inequality in its multiple dimensions: economic, social, cultural, religious, civil and political and even gender discrimination as reflected in Dalit literature in various Indian languages in novels, short stories, plays, poems, and other genres.

Beside literature, the panel will also have papers on Dalit visual arts and other arts exhibiting the experience of caste, untouchability and gender discrimination.

This theme will run throughout the three days of the conference through parallel sessions. We expect to have about 12 parallel sessions and about three keynote addresses and special lectures on this theme.

Panel 7 (b)

Media: Print, Television, Social Media and Films

The media is particularly popular for exclusion of Dalits be it print, television, or films. It is only in the social media that they have shown a significant presence. Therefore, the papers in this panel will present and discuss the issue of exclusion of Dalits in all forms of media. It will also discuss the way media present the issue of discrimination of caste, gender, tribal, and religious minorities through print and television (in news), and projection in films.

This panel discussion will run for three days through parallel sessions. It is expected to have about 12 parallel sessions, and about three keynote addresses and special lectures on this theme.

8. Special Panel on Karnataka

The focus of the special panel on Karnataka will be on the status of scheduled castes, Tribes, minorities, and issues related to human development, that includes income, poverty, malnutrition, education, health, housing, civic amenities, and civil rights, including untouchability in rural and urban areas.

This Panel will

- Discuss the progress and present social and economic status of the scheduled castes, and review policies including special component plan, and analyse factors that influence the present status;
- The progress and present social and economic status of the scheduled tribes,

nomadic and de-notified , and similar groups, review of policies including Tribal sub plan and minorities; and and analyse factors that influence the present status;

- The progress and present social and economic status of minorities and analyze factors that influence the present status;
- Discuss issues relating to aspirational districts/ taluks;
- The issues related to poverty and malnutrition, education and health: In *health sectors* the papers will examine the intergroup inequality in malnutrition, like child mortality, child health, anemia, women health, life expectancy, status of health institution, like primary health centers and access to health services and suggest changes, if necessary; This session also assess the magnitude of inequalities in health outcomes and to explain the contribution of different factors to the overall inequality in karnataka
- The issues related to participation in and obtaining benefits from Panchayat Raj Institutions.