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Q6(a)

In what respects have the constitutional provisions changed the socio-economic and political conditions of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India? Critically examine

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Tribal communities in India

Tribal communities in India: Definitional problems; Geographical spread; Colonial policies and tribes; Issues of integration and autonomy.

Core demand of the question

- List key constitutional provisions for SC and ST (Arts 15, 16, 17, 46, 330-342, Fifth/Sixth Schedules, 338/338A, 15(4), 16(4), 21A)
- **Show socio-economic and political change:** representation, education, a middle class, atrocity law
- **Be critical:** creamy layer debates, land, forest, violence, sub-classification, gaps for women

Revision summary

Articles 15-17, 16(4), legislative reservation, commissions and the Schedules form the SC/ST constitutional machine.

They produced political presence and an educated professional minority unprecedented in 1950.

PoA, PESA and FRA extend protection into violence and livelihood, with weak delivery.

Landlessness, atrocities, displacement and intra-group inequality remain.

The Constitution changed conditions without completing social democracy.

Introduction

The Constitution did not leave Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to charity. It built a **protective discrimination and representation machine**: equality clauses, abolition of untouchability, reservation in legislatures and services, scheduled-area government, and later national commissions. The sociological question is how far that machine changed **life chances** as well as **letterhead**.

Body

What the provisions did

Article 17 made untouchability a public crime, later given teeth by the **Protection of Civil Rights Act** and the **SC/ST (PoA) Act, 1989**. **Articles 15(4) and 16(4)** authorised reservation in education and posts; **330-334** (and analogous Rajya Sabha/state seats) guaranteed political presence. **338 and 338A** created NCSC and NCST. **Fifth and Sixth Schedules** recognised tribal territorial difference. **Article 46** directed the state to promote educational and economic interests. Together they produced an **SC/ST professional and political class** that did not exist in 1950: IAS and engineering graduates, panchayat

presidents, and a Dalit-Bahujan intelligentsia.

Panchayati Raj reservations (73rd/74th) and scholarships widened the base. Forest rights (**FRA 2006**) and **PESA (1996)** tried to convert schedule into livelihood, with mixed results. **Article 21A** and RTE matter here because SC/ST exclusion from school was a social fact, not a taste.

Critical remainder

Landlessness among SC agricultural labour remains high. Atrocities continue; conviction rates disappoint. **ST** displacement by dams and mines shows that schedule plus industrial policy can collide. A **creamy layer** debate, and the Supreme Court's opening to **sub-classification** within SC, register internal inequality. Women of both groups face a double bind. Political reservation can yield **proxy candidates**. Urban informal SC/ST workers live outside the reservation office.

E. V. Ramasamy and regional anti-caste parties show that constitutional clauses work only when a movement uses them. **Ghurye's** assimilation thesis for tribes sits uneasily beside **Fifth Schedule** autonomy; policy still wobbles. Manual scavenging bans exist; the occupation persists as a caste-class knot. Constitutional change is **real and unfinished**: status mobility for a minority of families, continued structural violence and asset poverty for the many.

Ambedkar wanted social democracy, not only a schedule. The provisions moved India toward that; they did not complete it. A critical exam answer therefore holds two sentences together: representation rose; land, safety and dignity did not rise in step.

Flow diagram

Arts 15-17 16 330-342 Schedules -> Legislative and service presence
Arts 15-17 16 330-342 Schedules -> Education and a middle class
Land violence informal work -> Unfinished equality

Conclusion

Constitutional provisions created representation, a service class, and a legal language against untouchability and tribal dispossession. They have not equalised land, safety or dignity. The record is structural progress with a harsh remainder.

Facts & figures

Article 17

Abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form.

PoA Act 1989

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act; special offences and special courts.

FRA 2006

Forest Rights Act recognising individual and community forest rights, aimed especially at ST and forest dwellers.

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