

## **All are Equal**

Caste system is the bane for the Indian society. The caste system divides the Indian society into sectarian groups and classes. Despite of the growth of culture and civilization still the caste system plays a predominant role in our society.

- The terms 'Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes' (SC/ST) are the official terms used in government documents to identify former untouchables and tribes. However, in 2008 the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, noticing that the word 'Dalit' was used interchangeably with the official term 'Scheduled castes', asked the state Governments to end the use of the word 'Dalit' in official documents calling the term 'unconstitutional' and to replace it with the term 'Scheduled Caste' instead.
- The roots of the caste system are traced back to the age old times . While one view discriminates between the castes as upper and lower castes on the basis of their origin, another view traces the origin of the castes to varnas which classifies the caste system on the basis of their functions. Since then on it was found that undue advantage was taken by the section of people having an upper hand and a say in the community, leading to discrimination & exploitation of the weaker sections of community.
- The people from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, referred to as 'untouchables' form one sixth of India's population or 160 million, they endure discrimination and segregation.

**Some of the evil faces of this system are –**

**Untouchability** - Many villages are separated by caste and they may not cross the line dividing them from the higher castes. They also may not use the same wells or drink in the same tea stalls as higher castes.

**Discrimination** - They often do not have the facility to electricity, sanitation facilities or water pumps in lower caste neighborhoods. Access to better education, housing and medical facilities than that of the higher castes is denied.

**Division of labour** – They are restricted to certain occupations like sanitation work, plantation work, leather works, cleaning streets etc.,

**Slavery** – They are subjected exploitation in the name of debt, tradition etc., to work as labourers or perform menial tasks for generations together.

The Indian Government has enacted laws to remove untouchability and has also brought in many reforms to improve the quality of life for the weaker sections of society. Few among them are :

- Constitutionally guaranteed fundamental human rights
- Abolition of 'untouchability' in 1950
- Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
- Provision of reservation in places like educational institutions, for employment opportunities etc.,
- Establishing social welfare departments and national commissions for the welfare of scheduled castes and tribes

These measures adopted by the government have brought some relief to the weaker sections of society . The urban areas have shown good amount of impact and some improvement. However people in rural areas and villages still face extreme discrimination. We indeed have a long way to go in achieving the objectives set to eradicate and abolish discrimination, on basis of caste and creed to the letter and spirit laid down in our constitution. It now depends on our efforts and a change in our attitudes is sure to see a perpetual change, bringing about equality for all.