

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 1 – Society – Salient features of society

Present State of Caste-Based Inequality in India: Insights and Significance

Persistent Inequality: Despite economic growth, caste-based disparities endure in India, evident in income, education, and job opportunities.

Poverty Data:

- Higher poverty levels among Scheduled Castes (42.93%) and Scheduled Tribes (42.7%) compared to other groups.
- General category castes have a higher representation (3.19%) in government jobs than SC, ST, and OBC groups.
- Significant disparity in graduate percentages among different caste groups, with the general category having the highest (14.54%).

Economic Mobility: Caste remains a barrier to social and economic mobility, hindering progress in India.

Income Inequality:

- World Inequality database shows a sharp increase in income inequality in India from 1990 to 2018.
- Top 10% saw their share rise from 34.4% to 57.1%, while the bottom 50%'s share dropped from 20.3% to 13.1%.
- Top 1% accounts for nearly half of the increase in the top 10%'s income share.

Significance of the Data:

- Access to government jobs remains a primary source of income increase and social mobility for the underprivileged.
- Access to education is crucial for occupational mobility from traditional family jobs.
- OECD findings on economic mobility show that in India, moving from the bottom 10% to the mean income level takes about seven generations, highlighting challenges.

Intergenerational Mobility:

- Azim Premji University highlights that sons of casual wage workers often remain in similar employment, even with higher education, pointing to issues with education quality.

Recommendations:

1. **Focus on Education and Skill Development:** While caste-based reservations may still be necessary, the primary emphasis should be on improving access to education and skill development.
2. **Enhance Intergenerational Mobility:** Quality education and skill development are crucial for reducing inequality and ensuring equitable economic growth.
3. **Reduce Caste-Based Barriers:** Eliminate occupational specialization linked to caste, following B.R. Ambedkar's advice, and emphasize skill acquisition.

By addressing these issues, India can make significant strides in reducing caste-based inequality and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.