

# What election manifestos have offered to the SCs



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It's a given that promises are concomitants of elections in several countries. In some countries, it is mandatory for political parties to submit their manifestoes to the election commission prior to the elections. It is only after the commission gives a nod after scrutinizing the manifestoes that parties go about soliciting votes, reeling out promises. But there is no such practice in India.

National and regional parties draw up their own election manifestos on their own in India and get them circulated in the public domain. But a sufficient measure of dialogue does not happen, either before or after the elections, about the link between the political parties' promises and the social uplift, if any, caused by the implementation of the promises. If it happens in the future, new avenues for elevation for parties and society can be explored. In this connection, we can discuss the promises made for the Scheduled Castes in the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections.

**Past election manifestos**

In the past two parliamentary elections, the promises made by all parties were pertaining to national education, transport, commerce, technology, women, children, medicine, agriculture, infrastructure and defense. There is no denying that all these sectors must get proper attention. But at the same time, these seem to be 'general' issues that on several occasions do not sufficiently take into account the goal of uplifting the SCs. For instance, let us take up the promise of measures for indigenous industrial development while focusing on global industrial progress. This may look like a 'general' promise targeting all sections of people. Those who captured power giving out this promise should have really brought about industrial progress. But it is to be pondered whether the 'general' promises had yielded any benefits to those, who had long been denied opportunities and facilities to start even small industries, owing to the barrier of caste. To create a level playing field for both the rich and the poor alike may be a measure of equality, but hardly social justice. In the past, the promises concerning the 'general schemes' had plenty of equality but social justice only in small measure.

### **Promises and special attention**

The promises made for the SCs in the manifestos in the past two general elections were less than one per cent. That too, they were only education-centric. Those promises might have raised hopes among the first-generation literates in SC families. But they had not paid attention to the SCs who were educated and waiting for opportunities for jobs or launching industries.

When it comes to job and industrial opportunities, special attention should be given to the SCs. This paramount need has long been pending. According to the 2011 census, the SC population was 16.63 per cent. During this time, the funds earmarked for the SCs' uplift was not in proportion to their population. Hence, their social and economic condition has not improved at the expected level, says the annual report of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes for the fiscal 2018-19 and 2019-2020. The report has pointed out a

large gap between the human development indexes for the SCs and the others. Examining the funds allocations and expenditure for the general schemes, the report says the funds allotted for the SCs has been used for various schemes not connected with the SCs' welfare. This is the state of affairs in fund allocations made in several states too. Backed up by statistical data, the report has revealed that out of the funds earmarked for the SCs, only 1 to 4 per cent has been spent for them. Hence, the Commission has suggested that the sub-schemes for the SCs must be integrated schemes part of annual and five-year plans.

On the other hand, according to the National Crime Records Bureau data, crimes against the SCs in 2019-20 have gone up by 9.4 per cent and crimes against SC women and children by 15.5 per cent, but the conviction rate has been less. It is against this background that the demand for special attention to the SC development has been gaining traction seamlessly.

While listing the social barriers against the SCs, the Commission has come up with important recommendations for their security and development. The following recommendations are of vital importance: The parents' income ceiling for scholarships for the SC students pursuing higher education must be enhanced during specific time intervals; the basic rules for the SCs launching industries must be relaxed; the government itself must provide the collateral for the SCs to get industrial loans; lands must be provided to the SCs for launching industries on the lines of the Special Economic Zone; exemption from service tax should be granted and additional opportunities must be given to SCs under the schemes for entrepreneurship, jobs and skill development and the government must monitor the environment conducive to the SC's complete utilisation of the opportunities officially created for them.

### **Important demands**

Apart from the commission's recommendations, there are important demands put forward by various regional SC welfare organisations:

Panjami lands must be redeemed and handed over to the real owners; reservation system must be followed in floating of government tenders, allotment of commercial complexes, appointment of lawyers and promotions; vacancies of posts for SCs should be filled immediately, measures must be taken to weed out caste discriminations on the campuses of institutions of higher learning; stringent steps must be taken to put an end to sewage deaths/honour killings; special budget for the SCs must be submitted and exclusive banks for the SCs must be set up.

In addition, there is also the long-pending demand that facilities must be created to eliminate the local hindrances to the SCs starting industries and to ensure that the products manufactured by the SCs gain a considerable space in the market.

For fulfilling all these demands, it will be enough to fully utilise the funds currently earmarked for the SCs' welfare. Taking these points into account, the election manifestos must be drawn up. If the manifestoes are followed in letter and spirit by the party that captures power, the SCs' life will get a shot in the arm. Opportunities and sharing must be made, depending on the measure of need. That will be useful for the country's wholesome growth.

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**