

What's in store for the DALIT-ADIVASI Budget 2022-23

The year 2021 has been a challenging year where hundreds of citizens lost their lives while the country's health care system succumbed to Covid-19's second wave. India was gasping for oxygen amidst an out of control unavailability and a crisis of health care facilities. Patients died outside hospitals waiting for beds if at all they had the opportunity to reach there before they lost their battles to Covid. However, amidst the global pandemic, while even the most socio-economically privileged section was struggling, how did Dalits and Adivasis manage to support their livelihood and survival?

In Dalit and Adivasi households, especially in villages, the infrastructure required for proper isolation is a luxury. In several states, the isolation camps set up by the government were made inaccessible to Dalits and Adivasis as the dominant castes did not want to share a common space with them, highlighting the broadened caste divide. The hospital bed charges were record high and the poor marginalised communities could not even imagine getting one. Even having access to sanitiser and masks was a distant reality. This is one of the countless forms of discrimination faced by marginalised communities during the pandemic. The crematorium workers, sanitation workers and frontline workers worked ten times more and still were thrown pennies at.

Against this background, the Finance Minister presented the Union Budget 2022 which was expected to take some of these concerns on hand, but it was rather a lack lustre budget. The total allocation for SCs under the Allocation of the Welfare of the SCs (AWSC) is Rs. 1,42,342 Crs and for STs under the Allocation of the Welfare of the STs (AWST) is Rs. 89,265 Crs. The budget revealed the deficiencies in their policies and lack of political commitment to uplift the Dalit and Adivasi communities. When one looks at the quantum and quality of schemes, there is not a single innovative scheme to address the pandemic and the impact of this on the communities.

The sole guarantor of protection against atrocities against Dalits and Adivasis, the POA Act received an allocation of Rs. 600 Crores for its implementation which is yet again an insufficient amount considering the never-ending rise of caste-based atrocities against Dalits, especially women and children. According to the 2019 NCRB data, a total of 7,510 crimes against Dalit women were registered under POA Act whereas the numbers were 6,818 in the year 2018. However, the allocation for addressing crimes against Dalit women sees only Rs. 180 Cr. It is not a hidden reality that the number of cases of discrimination and atrocity is way higher than the registered cases. Most of the people from discriminated communities do not have the access to the modes of registering complaints.

As usual, the majority of the schemes remain notional and do not have a direct benefit to the communities. It looks like some of these schemes are placed erroneously in this budget, is this an

error or just deliberate negligence towards the development of the SCs and STs. In Several engagements with the ministries, this has been pointed out in the analysis, it has been continuously occurring, which points to the latter it is wilful negligence of the government.

31% of the schemes amounting to Rs. Cr. 44,429 that are allocated for SCs seem to be erroneously placed under Dalit Budget as those schemes do not have any financial flows for the welfare or development of SCs. For the STs, it is 24% of the Adivasi budget, Rs. 21,398 Crs are erroneously placed. Conversely, it is also noticed that many effective schemes are starved of allocation especially in the Department of Higher Education, says Mr Paul Divakar, Chairperson, Asia Dalit Rights Forum.

Manual scavenging is one of the most dehumanizing works and its continuation despite The Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act is very disappointing. According to the report submitted by MSJE, 63,246 manual scavengers have been identified across the country. There is an allocation of only Rs 70 Crs for the rehabilitation of manual scavengers. Appallingly there is even no allocation for the “post-matric scholarship of those children whose parents are engaged in unclean occupations and prone to health hazards” scheme.

The murder of education and academic calibre by institutional and systematic discrimination against Dalit and Adivasi students perpetuated by dominant caste administration, faculty and other students is heart-wrenching. This year we welcome an increase in the Post Matric Scholarship allocation of Rs. 5660 Crs for SCs and Rs. 1965 Crs for STs. It is the historical exclusion from citizenship and economic rights that have ensured in India that a person from a Dalit family with a similar degree as a person from a dominant caste family would be excluded from a salaried job and the economic and social security that comes with it. Also, because of the economic plight, it is more likely that a person from a marginalised section has to succumb to any work available to sustain the lives and livelihood of the family.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:

- 1) **Allocation:** All obligatory ministries should allocate population proportionate funds for Dalits and Adivasis
- 2) **Post Matric Scholarship:** Allocation to direct benefit schemes like Post-Matric Scholarships, hostels, skill development schemes should be increased and timely transfer of funds should be ensured to beneficiaries at all costs.
- 3) **SC & ST Women Allocation:** Allocation of 50% for Dalit women and a special component plan for Dalit women should be established with strong mechanisms to monitor and ensure effective implementation.

- 4) **Social Protection:** A minimum social protection floor that guarantees access to universal basic health care including maternity benefit and basic income security to all Dalits and Adivasis.
- 5) **PWD Allocation:** All schools and hostels must be made disabled-friendly keeping in mind the needs of people with disabilities and adequate allocation should be provided.
- 6) **Legal Provision:** Lack of legislative framework for implementation of SC & ST schemes has led to lack of implementation of most schemes. There is therefore an urgent need for the passing of SCP/TSP legislation.
- 7) **Allocation for DRR and CCA:** Allocate population proportionate funds and a basket of schemes for direct Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) programmes for SC and ST communities to build their resilience and adaptive capacity. These Schemes can include livelihood to strengthen coping mechanisms during droughts, especially of the landless agricultural labourers, women farmers and farmworkers.
- 8) **Access to Justice:** Allocation should be increased to prevent crime against Dalit women, men, children, people with disabilities and queer and trans persons. There is a need for establishing clear mechanisms to provide protection and security to any victims of caste-based discrimination and violence. The current allocation is grossly inadequate. Special Courts should be set up for speedy trials of cases, and increased compensation should be given to victims of caste and ethnicity-based atrocities.
- 9) **Elimination of Manual Scavenging:** It is important to completely eliminate the practice of manual scavenging, hence allocate adequate resources to address this issue both to eliminate this practice completely and also ensure rehabilitation of the women and men engaged in this practice.