

Indian Government to set up panel to study status of SC converts to Islam and Christianity



The Central Government will constitute a national commission to study the social, economic and educational status of members of Scheduled Castes or Dalits who have converted to religions other than Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

Key facts

- This proposed commission is significant as several petitions are currently pending before the Supreme Court seeking SC reservation benefits for Dalits who have converted to Christianity or Islam.
- The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 under Article 341 states that no individual belonging to religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism can be recognized as a member of the Scheduled Caste.
- The original order classified SC members belonging to only Hinduism. It was later amended in 1956 to include Sikhs and in 1990 to include Buddhists.
- The proposed commission would have 3 to 4 members with its chairman being a Union Cabinet Minister.
- It will be involved in the comprehensive analysis of the changes in status and situation of Dalits who have converted to Christianity or Islam.
- It will also study the impact of adding more members into the current SC list.
- It will not include members of STs and OBCs who have converted to Islam and Christianity.
- This is because the STs receive benefit regardless of their religion and several Christian and Muslim communities are already benefited by being part of the central and states' lists of OBCs.
- SCs are currently given 15 per cent reservation for direct recruitment in central government jobs.

Ranganath Misra Commission

The National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities headed by the former Chief Justice of India Justice Ranganath Misra was set up in 2004 to recommend ways to ensure welfare of socially and economically backward sections among linguistic and religious minorities in India. This commission recommended the complete delinking of SC status from religion and make it religion-neutral like STs. This recommendation was not adopted as it did not have sufficient backing from field studies.