BLANKET POWERS AND BARRIERS TO JUSTICE: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES (PREVENTION OF ATROCITIES) ACT, 1989

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ABSTRACT

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, enacted with the intent to protect historically marginalized communities from violence, discrimination, and exploitation, has emerged as both a shield of justice and a subject of critical debate due to its far-reaching provisions. While the Act incorporates special measures such as exclusive courts, public prosecutors, and victim relief mechanisms intended to ensure swift justice, its implementation reveals serious systemic challenges. Provisions such as Sections 18 and 18A, which restrict anticipatory bail and grant blanket arrest powers to the police, have often been criticized for being draconian, creating a presumption of guilt and leading to arbitrary arrests, politically motivated actions, and prolonged detention of innocent individuals. The wide discretionary powers vested in the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) further amplify concerns of misuse and lack of accountability, as many cases are marred by poor investigation, procedural lapses, and delays in evidence collection. Simultaneously, genuine victims of atrocities struggle with delayed disbursement of monetary relief, hostile retractions of statements under social pressure, and the inability of an overburdened police force to provide adequate protection or support, resulting in a high acquittal rate and low conviction rate under the Act. Judicial interventions, such as in Dr. Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra (2018) and subsequent rulings, have attempted to strike a balance between protecting victims and preventing misuse, but the ground reality remains fraught with challenges. This paper critically examines the barriers to justice created by blanket powers, evaluates the gaps in implementation, and proposes reforms such as curbing arbitrary police authority through oversight, ensuring timely victim relief, strengthening training and accountability of law enforcement, and revising draconian provisions to restore fairness while safeguarding vulnerable groups, thereby moving towards a more balanced and just legal framework.

Keywords: SC/ST Act, Atrocities, Blanket Powers, Anticipatory Bail, Arbitrary Arrests.

INTRODUCTION

India is a country with a civilizational bedrock that gave birth to a composite culture with its main religion Hinduism, along with its branches that are now often referred to as different religions, namely Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism etc., often known as the dharmic religions, although constitutionally they are all still grouped under the term Hindu. One amongst the many issues that are still prevalent is the caste system based discrimination in the society. Multiple social reformers, politicians undertook several steps to reform the society and stop this discrimination, and that has today lead to the formation of the Scheduled castes and schedules tribes (prevention of atrocities), 1989. This ACT has a very optimistic legislative intent, that is to address the entrenched violence, discrimination, and systemic marginalisation faced by Dalits and Adivasis in India. This ACT is one of the examples of the legislative embodiment of the concept of social justice that has been a part of the soul of the constitution of India.

This act aims to effectively protect the vulnerable sectors, criminalise discriminations ensure that the victims are compensated and right to dignified life for the oppressed sections of the society. Despite this, there are a few reasons why this Act finds itself in the hot waters of debate and controversies. This Act, on one hand is hailed that it protects the vulnerable sectors of the society from atrocities, while a few sections of this ACT has given sweeping powers, that creates huge troubles, if misused, as noted by the Honourable courts in the country as well.

In India, the legislative framework has time and again intervened in religions, and traditional practices and as prohibited the social evils and criminalised them, in order to protect those vulnerable due to that evil (dowry prohibition act, triple talaq, prohibition of sati practise etc).One of the very first legislations in this regard was the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, which was later amended as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976. In spite of all this, nothing succeeded in containing the atrocities that were being committed to the oppressed sections of the society.

The inadequacy and failure of these legislations to provide social justice, victim rehabilitation etc were very much evident. This paved way for the Scheduled castes and schedules tribes (prevention of atrocities ACT), 1989. This was also the time when the P.V. Narasimha Rao

government decided to implement the Mandal commissions report which stated that 52% of India's population belonged to the 'OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES' and 27% reservations were mandated to them. This action by the then government was vindicated in the Indra Sawhney v. Union of India case judgement by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, which laid a cap of 50% on the reservations and introduced the concept of creamy layer. This ACT was introduced as a comprehensible mechanism for social justice for the vulnerable sections and this was known by the face of stringent punishments, special fast track courts etc.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The caste system and its discriminations are centuries old, but when India became independent, the constitution makers, envisioned an equal society where everyone lived with dignity and fraternity with no discrimination in any forms against them or their communities[1]. For the implementation of social justice as stated in the preamble of the constitution, the legislation amended article 15 and added clause 4, 5, 6 which allowed the state to make decisions for the community specific treatment of those who are educationally and socially backwards, the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. Despite constitutional safeguards, the atrocities against those communities were extreme and frequent clashes were recorded, especially in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Bihar during the 1980s, forcing the parliament to enact this particular Act to close down the legal loopholes and to strengthen the process of social justice to the oppressed communities. In the year 1978 a multi member non statutory committee, through a ministry of Home Affairs resolution (resolution no1301219/77- SCT (1) dated 21.7.1978), headed by SH Bhola Paswan Shastryas the first chairperson, was set up to advise the government regarding the levels of development of the SC/ST communities and to broaden the policy making of the government in this regard. This commission was later renamed as the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes and was later replaced with a statutory body by the same name in the year 1990 following the 65th amendment of the constitution. In the year 2004, 89th constitutional amendment lead to the bifurcation of the commission into two - National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST). This commission spearheaded the 89th amendment 2003, which came to effect on 19.02.2004 in the form of article 338.

[1] Prakash, C.M., 2017. Sociological evaluation of prevention of atrocities act 1989. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*, *6*(10), pp.88-108.

Legal Frameworks and Key provisions

Sections 14, 14A, 15 and 15A of the SC/ST (PoA) Act are widely seen as pro-victim safeguards, and rightly so. They provide for speedy trial through Special Courts, quick appeals, the role of Special Public Prosecutors, and—most importantly—stronger victim and witness protection. These provisions acknowledge that justice for Dalits and Adivasis cannot wait, and that victims need institutional support to withstand social pressure. At the same time, however, Sections 18 and 18A stand apart as double-edged[2]. By barring anticipatory bail and even preliminary inquiry, they create a fertile ground for misuse in individual cases—where an accusation alone can devastate reputations and livelihoods before truth is tested. Thus, while the Act's core spirit is empowering, its over-rigidity in 18 and 18A has raised valid concerns about balance.

Institutional Framework and Governance Structure

Recently, Justice Surya Kant (Supreme Court), had remarked while hearing a case pertaining to the validity of section 152 of the BNS that "any good law, declared as constitutional by the SC, can be misused or abused by the police authorities". This comes in the time when the section 498A of IPC has also been subjected to severe misuse and has been noted my multiple high courts in the country including Madras, Delhi and the Hon'ble Supreme court as well[3]. Drawing upon this, the paper would like to critically examine the tension that prevails between the intent of providing social the probable misuse within the SC / ST (POA) act, 1989. This paper would only examine justice and the legal provisions as it is while keeping the historical context in view. The purpose of this paper is to strengthen the victim's justice and compensation, while also ensuring that the innocent are not unjustly subjected to discrimination due to the unchecked sweeping powers that are granted especially under sections 18 and 18A of this Act.

CURRENT SCENARIO

Overall Cases (2022 – NCRB). All the statistics presented here are taken from NCRB database.

[2] Verma, M., 2022. An Analysis of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. *Issue 5 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.*, *5*, p.514.
[3] Kumar, R., INTERPRETATION OF 'PUBLIC VIEW'UNDER SCHEDULED CASTE AND SCHEDULED TRIBE (PREVENTION OF ATROCITIES) ACT, 1989.

Category	Number of Cases Registered
SCs (Scheduled Castes)	51,656
STs (Scheduled Tribes)	9,375

Top States – Atrocities against SCs (2022-NCRB)

State	Cases	% of Total SC Cases
Uttar Pradesh	12,287	23.78%
Rajasthan	8,651	16.75%
Madhya Pradesh	7,732	14.97%

Top States – Atrocities against STs (2022-NCRB)

State	Cases	% of Total ST Cases
Madhya Pradesh	2,979	30.61%
Rajasthan	2,448	25.66%
Odisha	773	7.94%

Case Status and Charge Sheets filed and concluded along with its Final Reports-NCRB

Category	Charge sheet Filed (%)	Concluded with Final Report (%)
SC Cases	60.38%	14.78%
ST Cases	63.32%	14.71%
Category	Charge sheet Filed (%)	Concluded with Final Report (%)
SC Cases	60.38%	14.78%
ST Cases	63.32%	14.71%

Pending Investigations (End of 2022-NCRB)

Category	Pending Cases
SC Cases	17,166
ST Cases	2,302

Conviction Rate under SC/ST Act - NCRB

Year	Conviction Rate
2020	39.42%
2022	32.4%

[4]National Crime Records Bureau. *Crime in India 2022*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

It is to be noted that this Act remains controversial, while it is intended to ensure justice, its misuse has led to wrongful prosecutions, highlighted in Dr. Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v State of Maharashtra (2018).

Sections 18 and 18A of the Act have drawn heavy criticism. They block anticipatory bail and give the police the power to arrest immediately. The idea was to make sure victims were safe and that offenders didn't get away, but in practice it often turns into a kind of punishment before trial. Someone ends up arrested, stigmatised, and facing consequences long before any court decides if they are guilty. The investigation stage is where the cracks show most clearly. Many cases do not collapse because the allegation itself was false but because the evidence is weak or poorly handled. Police often lack specialised training, files are not maintained properly, and very basic mistakes—such as not recording a statement carefully or letting evidence go stale—end up damaging the prosecution. In that sense, the law on paper looks strong, but the machinery that is supposed to implement it struggles badly[5].

For victims, the gap between law and reality is even more visible. They face pressure from their own families or communities, which often forces them to withdraw complaints. Relief measures are slow, and the absence of proper witness protection means that coming forward feels unsafe. Instead of feeling supported, many victims feel exposed to new risks once they enter the system. The judicial process does not improve matters. The Act speaks of special courts for speedy trials, yet in most states cases are simply added to the burden of the regular session's courts. Trials drag on, adjournments pile up, and justice is delayed to the point of losing meaning.

Then comes the debate on misuse. Official data shows that false cases form only a small fraction, but the public discussion around it is far louder than the numbers justify. This narrative creates social backlash and makes people suspicious of complainants. As a result, genuine victims hesitate to approach the law. Ironically, it is not actual misuse but the constant fear and talk of misuse that has done more damage to the credibility of the Act.

Factors Influencing the Situation

The way this law works on the ground is shaped by a mix of social, economic, political and even technological factors. On the social level, caste hierarchies are still very strong, and local

[5] Tandon, P., 2021. The SC/ST POA Act and Their Recent Judgements. *Jus Corpus LJ*, *2*, p.805.

power groups often decide how far a victim can actually push a case. Protection in the Act exists, but in many villages it is undercut by the pressure of community ties. The economic angle makes this pressure heavier. Dalits and Adivasis are often dependent on dominant castes for daily wages, land, or other work. Filing a case is not just a legal step, it risks a boycott or even being cut off from livelihood. So people hesitate, and many cases do not even begin properly[6].

On the political side, mobilisation along caste lines has kept the Act in constant debate. Some groups present it as a necessary safeguard and symbol of empowerment. Others frame it as a tool of harassment. Because of this, individual cases are quickly pulled into larger identity struggles, and the law itself becomes a political symbol rather than just a legal instrument.

Finally, the legal and technological factors are mixed. Digital platforms have made atrocities more visible; videos, posts and online campaigns spread awareness in ways that were not possible earlier. But the same speed also turns many cases into immediate political controversies, sometimes before the facts are clear. At the same time, the state's investigative tools are limited. Forensic labs are slow, police often lack technological support, and this weakens the investigation.

Government or Policy Response

The government has, every now and then, stepped in to make changes in the Act when certain gaps became too visible. For instance, in 2015 the amendment widened what could be counted as an atrocity and also made it clearer that the state itself is responsible for relief and rehabilitation. A few years later, in 2018, after the Supreme Court's Mahajan judgment which had introduced safeguards before arrest, Parliament reacted quickly and brought another amendment to set that aside and restore the earlier position. The law also talks about special courts and exclusive public prosecutors, but in reality these do not always function as intended. In many states the special courts are either not set up at all or they run just like ordinary courts, so the expectation of faster and more focused hearings does not really work out. Something similar can be said about schemes for relief and rehabilitation. They are available on paper, but people often end up waiting for months because of bureaucratic delays, repeated paperwork,

[6] Yeole, V.M., 2021. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 with Reference to Discrimination Faced by Residents of North-Eastern States in India. *Legal Lock J.*, *1*, p.43.

and sometimes lack of coordination between departments[7].

Apart from this, there has also been the setting up of National Commissions for SCs and STs, which in principle are supposed to monitor and intervene in such cases. While their mandate is broad, in practice their involvement is uneven and depends a lot on local conditions and political will. Often their reports are written, but the follow-up is either slow or limited. In recent years, governments have also spoken more about police sensitisation and awareness at the community level. These steps are important, but the results on the ground are mixed. Many of the same difficulties—like delays in cases, social pressure on victims, and weak investigation methods—still remain much as they were earlier.

Objective of the Study

To look at the lived reality of both victims and the accused. Victims often face social pressure, threats, and endless delays. Relief funds are late, trials drag on, and many simply give up. On the flip side, accused persons often face arrest first and justice later, with little chance to defend themselves in the early stages. This imbalance is something the study tries to unpack.

The courts have also played a huge role. Cases like Dr. Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra[8] (2018) showed how the judiciary is trying to find a middle ground. One of my aims is to study whether those judicial interventions have actually improved things on the ground or just added to the confusion.

And then there's the bigger picture. The Act doesn't operate in isolation—it is shaped by caste hierarchies, local politics, economic dependence, even how the media reports these cases. Part of my objective is to see the law in that wider setting, not just as words on paper.

Finally, this paper is not just about pointing fingers. The larger purpose is to think of ways to make the Act fairer and more effective. What reforms can ensure that Dalits and Adivasis remain protected, but at the same time innocent people are not ruined by misuse? In short, the

[7] Sharma, K., 2024. Remedies against False SC/ST Act Cases in India. *LawFoyer Int'l J. Doctrinal Legal Rsch.*, *2*, p.844

[8] Kasana, A., 2025. Shield or Sword? The Double-Edged Law of Atrocities. *Journal of Legal Research and Polity*, *2*(2), pp.1-14

objective of this study is to ask how this law can stay true to its original spirit of justice while correcting the gaps that have shown up over time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Analysis of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989

Author: P Acharya

The author of this paper argues that the Supreme Court in Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra (2018) weakened the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. According to him, "by asking for a preliminary inquiry before filing an FIR, requiring prior approval before arresting a public servant, and opening the door to anticipatory bail, the Court made the Act "toothless." He insists this gave cover to potential offenders and ignored the lived reality of Dalits and Adivasis[9]".

This is a passionate critique, but it overlooks why the Court intervened in the first place. The judgment was not about dismantling protections; it was about making sure those protections do not get weaponised against innocent people. Law, especially criminal law, must serve both victims and the accused fairly. Seen in this light, the Court's directions can be understood as attempts to uphold Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution—the right to equality and the right to life and liberty.

First, the idea of a preliminary inquiry was not a way of blocking complaints. It was meant as a short check to filter out patently false or malicious cases. Anyone who has faced the stigma of a false FIR knows how devastating it can be for reputation and livelihood. Far from shutting the door on victims, it asked the police to pause briefly before taking action that could ruin someone's career without basis.

Second, the requirement of prior approval for arrest of public servants was not immunity. It only meant that a senior authority had to be satisfied that there was enough material before

[9] Nawsagaray, N., 2018. Misuse of the prevention of atrocities Act: scrutinising the Mahajan judgment, 2018. Economic & Political Weekly, 53(22).

taking such a serious step. This added a layer of accountability on the State itself. Arrests could still be made; they just could not be knee-jerk.

Third, anticipatory bail is not a loophole but a safety valve. The Court merely clarified that if no prima facie case is shown, or if the complaint looks clearly mala fide, then courts may protect the accused from unnecessary humiliation. It is telling that later benches of the Supreme Court itself upheld Parliament's amendments restoring stricter provisions, but they too allowed anticipatory bail in exceptional circumstances. This shows that both the legislature and judiciary agree that some balance is necessary.

Fourth, pointing to Parliament's 2018 amendment as proof that the Court was "wrong" oversimplifies the democratic process. Legislatures and courts often have different emphases—one may focus on strong victim protection, the other on fair procedure. That does not mean one cancels out the other; it means the system is in dialogue.

The idea that these safeguards made arrests impossible is exaggerated. The Act's key protections—special courts, higher penalties, and victim relief—remained fully in place. The Court simply wanted a sensible check before making arrests, acknowledging that atrocities are real while ensuring the law doesn't create new injustices. In the end, the judgment aimed to strike a balance: standing with the vulnerable while preventing misuse, so the law stays fair and credible. The Supreme Court weakened the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act when it introduced safeguards in Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra (2018). Their point is that the Act was born out of centuries of injustice, and so the fear of false cases should not be given much importance. Parliament's quick response through the 2018 Amendment, and its later validation in Prathvi Raj Chauhan v. Union of India[10] (2020), is presented as proof that the law must remain uncompromising in order to protect Dalits and Adivasis.

This argument sounds persuasive on the surface, but it has serious gaps. To say misuse does not matter simply because the law serves a noble cause is troubling. Criminal law cannot pick and choose when to care about fairness. Our Constitution guarantees liberty and due process to every individual—even the accused. Ignoring this, even for a good reason, risks turning justice

[10] Acharya, P. and Acharya, P., 2020. An Analysis of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Available at SSRN 3732709.

into revenge. The Court has long hel d, in cases like Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India[11] (1978), that no one can be stripped of personal freedom without fair safeguards.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Section 18 – Bar on Anticipatory Bail

Section 18 of the PoA Act removes the availability of anticipatory bail under Section 438 of the CrPC. This provision was upheld in State of M.P. v. Ram Krishna Balothia[12] (1995), with the Court observing that extraordinary crimes against marginalised groups require extraordinary legal responses. The intent was noble to prevent perpetrators from evading justice.

Yet in practice, misuse of this bar creates significant injustice. When allegations are false or mala fide, the accused is denied even the basic safeguard of pre-arrest bail. The Supreme Court in Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra (2018) recognised this imbalance, holding that anticipatory bail cannot be denied in all circumstances—especially where no prima facie case exists. The Court's dicta emphasised that Article 21 cannot be suspended merely because the allegation falls under the PoA Act. The problem is therefore not Section 18's purpose but its rigidity, which, when misapplied, becomes an instrument of harassment rather than protection.

Section 18A – No Preliminary Inquiry, No Prior Approval for Arrest

In response to Mahajan, Parliament enacted Section 18A in 2018. It declared that (i) no preliminary inquiry shall be required for registration of FIR, (ii) no approval is needed before arrest, and (iii) the bar on anticipatory bail remains absolute. This was clearly meant to restore the strong teeth of the Act.

However, when misused, this section is deeply problematic. Without preliminary checks, even frivolous or retaliatory complaints automatically mature into FIRs. Without prior approval, arrests may be made under pressure or to settle personal scores. The Supreme Court in Prathvi

[11] Bose, S.K., 2025. INTERPLAY OF ARTICLES 14, 19 AND 21 WITH REFERENCE TO MANEKA GANDHI CASE. *Available at SSRN 5312427*.
[12] Nandan, S. and Kansra, D., 2019. Bail under Special Legislation. *Bail: Law and Practice in India, Publication of the Indian Law Institute, Delhi*

Raj Chauhan v. Union of India (2020) upheld Section 18A, but its obiter dicta carved out a narrow window for anticipatory bail in exceptional cases. That very caveat reveals judicial anxiety about misuse. While Parliament feared dilution, the Court feared excess. The tension between them shows how the law, in the absence of balance, risks swinging from protection to persecution.

Section 19 – Arrest and Sanction in Case of Public Servants

Section 19 addresses the arrest and prosecution of public servants. While the Act did not originally require approval before arrest, the Mahajan judgment directed that sanction of the appointing authority (for officers) or the Superintendent of Police (for others) should be obtained. This was to prevent frivolous arrests that could disrupt administration.

When misused, absence of such checks can paralyse governance. A teacher disciplining a student, or a civil servant enforcing rules, could face immediate arrest on an allegation under the PoA Act, with little scope for verification. The Court's reasoning was that procedural filters enhance, not weaken, justice by ensuring action is taken against real offenders, not scapegoats. The controversy around Section 19 highlights how the line between "protection" and "immunity" is thin and needs constant judicial vigilance.

Under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, Section 173 replicates the old Section 154 CrPC: every cognizable offence must be recorded as an FIR. Since PoA offences are cognizable, FIR registration is automatic.

The difficulty arises when this rigidity is misused. A false allegation instantly transforms into an FIR, with devastating reputational and professional consequences. The Supreme Court in Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh (2014) acknowledged the mandatory nature of FIRs but allowed preliminary inquiry in sensitive categories of cases (such as corruption or matrimonial disputes). The logic applies with equal force to PoA cases involving personal enmity. The absence of such a filter amplifies the risk of misuse while still failing to reduce genuine atrocity cases[13].

[13] Choudhary, H., 2013. Lalita Kumari v. Govt of Uttar Pradesh: Touching upon Untouched Issues. *Nirma ULJ*, *3*, p.99.

Conclusion

Sections 18, 18A, 19, and the FIR mechanism under BNSS exemplify the dilemma of atrocity law: how to protect the vulnerable without creating space for injustice. The judiciary, through Mahajan, Prathvi Raj Chauhan, and Lalita Kumari, has tried to harmonise dignity with due process. The problem is not the existence of these provisions but their absolutist design. When rigidly applied or cynically misused, they erode both victim dignity and accused liberty. True justice demands that law be both a shield for the oppressed and a safeguard against its own misuse—because credibility of law rests on its fairness to all.

Despite the strong moral and legal foundation of the SC/ST (PoA) Act, its effectiveness on the ground has been uneven. One of the most glaring issues is the high rate of acquittals and low conviction rates. Court statistics reveal that while cases are registered in large numbers, very few translate into convictions. This is not always because complaints are false; more often, it reflects poor investigation, weak evidence gathering, or the failure to protect victims and witnesses from intimidation. The result is a justice system that raises expectations but rarely delivers closure.Another persistent problem is the delay in disbursal of monetary relief. The law clearly provides for immediate compensation at different stages of the case, but in practice, funds are either delayed, partially disbursed, or blocked by layers of bureaucracy. For families already facing social boycott or economic hardship, these delays mean justice denied in material terms. Instead of providing dignity, the system often forces victims into further dependence or silence.

From the accused's perspective, the limited scope of defence under Sections 18 and 18A has created its own set of injustices. The absolute bar on anticipatory bail, combined with the ease of registering FIRs without preliminary inquiry, means that reputations and livelihoods can be destroyed even before a charge is tested in court. The law, meant to empower the vulnerable, sometimes ends up producing fresh vulnerabilities for those wrongly accused. Finally, many cases collapse because of hostile or retracted witness and victim statements. Social pressure, intimidation, or inducement often lead victims to reverse their testimony in court. This not only sabotages genuine cases but also feeds the perception that the Act is easily misused. It points to a deeper structural weakness: the absence of strong witness protection and community-level support for victims who dare to speak out.

Suggestions for Reform

To restore credibility, the Act must evolve beyond punitive provisions and address both enforcement gaps and misuse concerns. The first step is greater police accountability and reformed powers. Police officers often treat atrocity cases as routine, leading to shoddy investigation. Independent monitoring, strict timelines for filing charge sheets, and penalties for negligent investigation could make a tangible difference.

Closely tied to this is the need for strengthened police training. Sensitisation programs must move beyond token workshops and focus on building real understanding of caste-based discrimination, while also training officers to distinguish genuine complaints from fabricated ones. A trained force is far more likely to handle cases with both firmness and fairness.

Legislative revision of Sections 18 and 18A is another pressing need. While the fear of dilution is real, the current "all-or-nothing" approach is unsustainable. Narrowly tailoring the bar on anticipatory bail, allowing limited judicial discretion, and permitting preliminary inquiries in appropriate cases would strike a better balance between victim protection and safeguarding innocents.

On the victims' side, streamlining support mechanisms is critical. Compensation must reach families on time, without forcing them through repeated rounds of paperwork. State commissions and district-level vigilance committees should be made answerable for lapses, and victims must be given access to counselling, relocation assistance, and legal aid as part of a holistic support system.

Finally, the long-term success of the Act depends on public awareness and education. Laws alone cannot erase entrenched discrimination; communities must be made aware of their rights, and society at large must internalise why caste-based violence is a crime against the collective conscience. Awareness campaigns, school curricula, and local outreach can help bridge the gap between legal protections on paper and social realities on the ground.