Society & Social Justice · GS - I

Despite comprehensive policies for equity and social justice, underprivileged sections are not yet getting the full benefits of affirmative action envisaged by the Constitution. Comment.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2024	GS - I	Society & Social Justice

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Affirmative action, constitutional provisions, Articles 15 and 16, reservation, SCs, STs, OBCs, social justice, representation, implementation gaps, educational inequality, discrimination

Model Answer

Introduction

Affirmative action seeks to overcome historical discrimination and unequal access to opportunities. The Constitution enables special measures for socially and educationally disadvantaged groups through reservations, protective provisions and welfare-oriented directives.

Constitutional Framework

Articles **15(4), 15(5) and 16(4)** provide a constitutional basis for special provisions and reservation for disadvantaged groups. Article 46 directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of weaker sections, while Articles 330 and 332 provide for political representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Why Benefits Remain Incomplete

1. Educational inequality: Unequal quality of schooling and limited access to higher education reduce the pool able to utilise reserved opportunities.

2. Implementation gaps: Delays, unfilled vacancies and weaknesses in monitoring can limit the effectiveness of reservation policies.

3. Unequal access: Better-informed and relatively advantaged sections within beneficiary communities may be better positioned to access opportunities.

4. Economic barriers: Poverty, inadequate digital access, geographical isolation and lack of preparatory resources restrict participation.

5. Social discrimination: Caste prejudice, stigma and exclusion can continue even after formal legal safeguards.

6. Limited reach: A substantial part of employment and economic activity lies outside sectors where conventional reservation mechanisms operate.

Way Forward

Affirmative action needs to be supported by quality education, scholarships, skill development, effective anti-discrimination mechanisms, institutional monitoring and better implementation of reserved opportunities. The focus should increasingly include **substantive equality**, not merely formal representation.

Conclusion

India's affirmative-action framework has expanded representation and opportunities, but structural inequalities and implementation deficits continue to limit its full impact. Social justice therefore requires affirmative measures to be combined with **capability enhancement, institutional inclusion and effective enforcement**.