



Reservation Politics in India: An Analysis of the Indian Reservation System

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ABSTRACT: The reservation in educational institutions and jobs for SC and ST communities of India initiated by our founding fathers of the Constitution passed 72 years and it is extended to next 2030 years in a periodic interval of 10 years terms. The novel objective was to uplift the underprivileged sections of people by facilitating reserve quota in jobs and education which was later included to OBC people. During this period it was scrutinized by different scholars and policy makers and the question of rationality was evaluated. Some of them opined positively in favour of it while others negatively. Thus this paper is an academic exercise to identify the positive and negative aspects leading to political intervention of reservation. The study concealed within India and debates on reservation system in greater domain of political system is analysed.

KEYWORDS: Reservation, politics, meritocracy, caste and underprivileged section, Government.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

India, a varied and complex country, has long struggled with the challenges of social inequality and traditional prejudice. The Indian government established a system of reserves or affirmative action to address this deeply rooted imbalance which initially attempted to empower marginalized and underprivileged people. This strategy has changed significantly throughout time as a result of the intricate interaction of historical, political, and sociological forces.

According to The National Sample Survey reports, 20 per cent of Indians are members of Scheduled Caste (SC), 9 per cent are Scheduled Tribe (ST), and 41 per cent are Other Backward Classes (OBC). This indicates that around 70% of the populace fits into a group that is currently reserved, while 30% belongs to the general category.

Although 41% population belongs to OBCs but still the precise number of OBCs in India is still heavily disputed and some social scientists claim that party politics have tainted census statistics. Statistically, the Mandal Commission and the National Sample Survey configured this as smaller in numbers but it is widely believed to be a sizeable one.

The SC community in India is made up of close to 260 million individuals which receive 15% reservation share in the government sector. Scheduled Tribes make up about 9% reservation share which is estimated to be over 1.17 million people. The general category population is estimated at 1.21 billion as per the 2011 Census. The general category which is called as unreserved category includes Upper Caste and Creamy Layer OBC.

India is the only democracy in the world that has explicitly enacted legal and constitutional measures for compensating discrimination—commonly referred to as reservations—to develop historically oppressed and socially backward segments of society. It has been attempting to find a balance between the demands of compensating discrimination in favor of specific castes and groups and its commitment to an overarching definition of equality in terms of fundamental liberties. India demonstrated that such a route is not only possible but also something that improves the democratic process itself, dispelling the notion that these two goals are irreconcilable. It has developed a sophisticated and intricate system of reservations through time. (Suri, 1994) Article 330, 332 & 334 of the Constitution contains special provisions relating to reservation for Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assemblies of the States and services and

posts under the state. Initially, the period for reservation was only 10 years but with various amendments it kept on increasing. The Constitution (104th Amendment) Act, 2019, increased to 80 years.

The regular increase of 10 years duration at the end of the term beginning from 1962 to the present day and extended up to 80 years now, provokes to ask the pertinent questions-

1. What intention encouraged the government to increase the duration of reservation?
2. Is there any political advantage of the ruling political party to extend the term?"

Thus this paper is a modest attempt to examine the positive and negative dimensions of reservation and the impact thereof.

II. POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE RESERVATION:

2.1 LESSENING HISTORICAL INJUSTICES:

Positive: To rectify past injustices and prejudice against Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the reservation system has proven crucial. By offering possibilities in politics, work, and education, it seeks to undo decades of social and economic marginalization.

Impact: Breaking the cycle of poverty and enfranchisement has enhanced these communities' social position and economic advancement.

2.2 INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY:

Positive: Reservations have diversified employment and educational institutions, ensuring that underrepresented groups are represented. This promotes a society that is more diverse and inclusive.

Impact: It encourages exposure to other viewpoints, occasions, and cultures, enhancing the social fabric of the country.

2.3 EMPOWERMENT:

Positive: By providing people from underprivileged origins with access to education and employment possibilities that they may not otherwise have, the policy empowers them.

Impact: This has promoted social mobility, which has helped people and families escape poverty and advance their socioeconomic standing.

2.4 DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION:

Positive: Assuring marginalized groups' political participation in legislative bodies and local governments ensures that their opinions are heard.

Impact: By addressing past under-representation in decision-making, strengthens democracy.

III. NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE RESERVATION SYSTEM:

3.1 DISCRIMINATION IN REVERSE:

Negative: According to critics, reservation can result in reverse discrimination, where those from non-reserved groups may have fewer prospects in education and employment.

Impact: As a result, these people may become resentful and frustrated, which might fuel societal unrest.

3.2 MERITOCRACY QUESTIONS:

Negative: Some claim that reservations undermine the meritocracy ideal since those with lesser scores or credentials may be given employment over those with higher qualifications.

Impact: When merit-based selection procedures are thought to be tainted, questions regarding fairness and effectiveness are raised.

3.3 CREAMY LAYER PROBLEM:

Negative: The "creamy layer" problem surfaces in the case of OBC reservations. Reservations may benefit relatively affluent members of OBC groups instead of others who are truly in need.

Impact: As a result, reservations may be less successful at addressing socioeconomic gaps within OBCs.

3.4 ADMINISTRATIVE DIFFICULTIES:

Negative: Managing and implementing reservation policies might be difficult from an administrative standpoint. It might be difficult to ensure benefits reach the intended recipients and prevent reservation abuse.

Impact: The efficacy of the policy may be hampered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and implementation challenges.

3.5 STIGMATISATION:

Negative: Stereotypes and prejudices can occasionally undermine reservation beneficiaries' self-esteem and social integration.

Impact: Stigmatisation may prevent people from privileged groups from achieving full integration and empowerment.

3.6 DIVISIVENESS:

Negative: With many communities and interest groups arguing for their causes, the reservations discussion may cause social and political tensions.

Impact: This polarisation and division might make it more difficult to establish common ground and solve larger societal problems.

IV. DEBATES ON RESERVATION POLITICS:

The Indian reservation system has undoubtedly been the topic of heated political discussion. Here are some significant political issues and discussions about reserve policy:

4.1 AFFIRMATIVE ACTION VS. MERITOCRACY:

The reservation policy in India has long been at the center of a contentious discussion over affirmative action and meritocracy. Reservations, according to critics, undermine merit-based hiring practices by letting those with lesser test scores or credentials get jobs over others with better qualifications. Supporters, on the other hand, argue that affirmative action is crucial for addressing historical injustices and advancing social fairness. Political debates have resulted from these opposing points of view, with various parties adopting stances that are consistent with their ideology. While some parties emphasize the need to maintain merit-based principles in education and employment, others argue that expanding reserves is necessary to solve socioeconomic inequities.

4.2 CREAMY LAYER, OBC RESERVATIONS, AND INCLUSIVITY:

It has been controversial to include the "creamy layer" in reserves for OBC. While the idea intends to deny reservation advantages to relatively wealthy members of OBC groups, defining and putting the creamy layer into practice has proven to be difficult. Political parties frequently argue about how to define and use the creamy layer, especially those that represent OBC interests. These arguments highlight the precarious balance that must be struck between helping the OBCs' most economically vulnerable members and avoiding the abuse of reservations. Additionally, arguments concerning whether reservations should be increased or re-evaluated continue to be made about the size of reservations and the inclusion of new categories.

4.3 REGIONAL VS. NATIONAL RESERVATION AND ECONOMIC CRITERIA:

The question of whether policies should be administered equally across the nation or customized to certain areas or states is another aspect of the reservation argument. To alleviate regional imbalances and disadvantages, regional political parties frequently support reservation measures exclusive to certain regions. In addition, others contend that reservations should be based on economic factors rather than caste or community identification, emphasizing the need to more effectively address economic backwardness. These discussions touch on political issues, and the perspectives taken by different parties reflect geographical factors, electoral plans, and ideological leanings. As political parties struggle to strike a balance between affirmative action, meritocracy, and social justice, the reservation policy in India continues to be a complicated and nuanced topic.

4.4 POLITICIZATION OF COMPETITIVE EXAMINATION VS. MERITOCRACY:

The reservation policy that has been extended unscrupulously every 10 years by the ruling government indirectly politicized the competitive examinations and corruption cases noticed thereof reflect the truthfulness. For the narrower political gain to receive support from the reserve group of people by the political party is mostly intended rather than meritocracy. It is a common demand that at least the competitive examination to select a suitable candidate on a merit basis is preferable rather than the reservation of seats for a particular section of people.

4.5 REFLECTION ON THE COMPETITIVE MINDSET VS. CATEGORIZATION OF COMPETITION:

The growth of a competitive mind-set is inextricably welcomed at any point in time. Free and fair competition among deserving candidates with requisite qualifications is expected to be a more intrinsic process to attract meritorious candidates from the market. However, the reservation has delimited the competition within a particular community like ST, SC, and OBC. Observation shows that the candidate belonging to a high-profile family with a sound economic background of a reserved community get opportunity more than the rest. Further, the competition is categorized within a community.

In addition, the qualifying requirements and cut-off marks may be influenced by reservation rules, which are intended to offer historically marginalized populations fair chances. As a result, candidates from restricted categories frequently have an easier time passing the early rounds of competitive tests like the UPSC and APSC. This strategy seeks to correct past wrongs and enhance social inclusion.

4.6 HIGH CUT-OFF MARKS VS. LOW CUT-OFF MARKS:

Discussions concerning justice and meritocracy are frequently sparked by the connection between reservation procedures and cut-off scores. Lower cut-offs for protected categories, according to critics, may jeopardize the meritocracy ideal by letting applicants with lower test scores get in. The advocates of reservations, on the other hand, stress the significance of redressing historical wrongs, even if it necessitates modifying cut-off scores to provide equitable opportunity.

Cut-off scores may differ dramatically depending on a candidate's category according to reservation restrictions. The government's dedication to social fairness and affirmative action is reflected in this variation. It recognizes that previously oppressed groups may confront new difficulties and that fair playing fields require lower cut-offs. Regional differences in educational opportunities and resources are also taken into account by reservation regulations. To account for the difficulties they confront, candidates from economically underdeveloped or isolated areas may have lower cut-off scores. This strategy strives to guarantee a more diverse representation of talent throughout the country.

4.7 CREAMY LAYER VS. NON-CREAMY LAYER:

Despite their intentions to encourage diversity, reservations are not without difficulties and conflicts. The right number of reservations should be made, and the "creamy layer" inside reserved categories is still debatable. The application of qualifying criteria and cut-off marks may be impacted by these difficulties.

Cut-off scores for competitive examinations like the UPSC and APSC are heavily impacted by reservation regulations. These laws seek to right past wrongs, advance social fairness, and provide previously oppressed populations chances. Cut-off scores and meritocracy continue to be a topic of contention, even though they contribute to the development of a more inclusive society. Continuous conversations aim to find a careful balance between ensuring equitable chances and upholding the values of merit-based selection. Balancing these aims remains a difficult issue.

V. SOME OBSERVATIONS:

The abolition of reservation politics in India is the subject of a complicated and divisive discussion. While there are compelling arguments for both sides of the debate, it is important to take into account several viewpoints that favour ending reservation politics:

5.1 MERITOCRACY AND EFFICIENCY: The ideas of meritocracy and efficiency form the foundation of one persuasive case made by those who favor ending reservation politics. Some claim that despite their best intentions, reservation systems occasionally contradict these core principles. They contend that individuals picked based entirely on merit may not always fulfil the same rigorous standards of competence as those selected through reservations. They contend that this may result in the appointment of people who are less competent for a position, which may have an impact on the general effectiveness of educational institutions, governmental organizations, and public corporations.

The argument made by those who favour ending reservation politics is that by doing so, India may establish a more equal playing field where success is completely dependent on a person's talents and efforts. According to this perspective, a merit-based system would make sure that the most qualified people are promoted to the top, promoting quality and efficiency across all industries. It's crucial to remember that individuals who support this strategy do so while admitting the complexity of the problem to advance a more performance-driven society.

5.2 NATIONAL UNITY AND SOCIAL HARMONY: The possibility for increased social harmony and national unity is a second justification for eliminating reservation politics. While initially intended to rectify past injustices, some people think that caste, religious, and ethnic differences may unintentionally be reinforced by India's reservation rules. They contend that the presence of reserve categories and quotas can strengthen identity-based disparities and impede the nation's development into a more unified and inclusive society.

Politics on reservations would no longer exist, according to supporters, and all people would be treated equally regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. They think that such an action might aid in bridging societal gaps and foster a feeling of harmony among various cultures. This viewpoint sees reservations as a stopgap measure to address past inequalities and advocates for a move towards a more integrated and peaceful society where every person is given equal chances regardless of caste or ethnicity.

5.3 REDUCING ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES: Reservation politics, particularly in their current form, may not be the most effective way to solve economic inequality in India, according to some opponents of keeping them in place. They argue that a more focused strategy, such as direct financial assistance, skill development

initiatives, or expenditures on healthcare and education, may be more successful in raising economically disadvantaged people and communities.

VI. CONCLUSION:

The viewpoint accepts the significance of resolving economic inequities but disputes whether caste-based reservations are the best method for doing so. Instead, it advocates refocusing resources and efforts on comprehensive economic development initiatives that may help all economically underprivileged persons, irrespective of caste or social standing. They contend that by doing this, India may more successfully combat poverty and socio-economic inequities, thereby diminishing the necessity for caste-based reservations.

While meritocracy, unity, and other means to resolving economic inequality are emphasized in arguments for ending reservation politics in India, it's important to understand that this position just reflects one side of a nuanced and complicated discussion. Indian constitutional principles, social realities, and historical injustices are all intertwined with the reservation problem. Removal of reservation politics should only be considered after careful examination of the possible outcomes and other measures to guarantee social fairness and inclusion.

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