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Mrs.S.Kalpna, presently Assistant professor of Law, VelTech Rangarajan Dr.Sagunthala R & D Institute of Science and Technology, Avadi. Formerly Assistant professor of Law, Vels University in the year 2019 to 2020, Worked as Guest Faculty, Chennai Dr.Ambedkar Law College, Pudupakkam. Published one book. Published 8Articles in various reputed Law Journals. Conducted 1Moot court competition and participated in nearly 80 National and International seminars and webinars conducted on various subjects of Law. Did ML in Criminal Law and Criminal Justice Administration.10 paper presentations in various National and International seminars. Attended more than 10 FDP programs. Ph.D. in Law pursuing.



Avinash Kumar



Avinash Kumar has completed his Ph.D. in International Investment Law from the Dept. of Law & Governance, Central University of South Bihar. His research work is on "International Investment Agreement and State's right to regulate Foreign Investment." He qualified UGC-NET and has been selected for the prestigious ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship. He is an alumnus of the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Formerly he has been elected as Students Union President of Law Centre-1, University of Delhi. Moreover, he completed his LL.M. from the University of Delhi (2014-16), dissertation on "Cross-border Merger & Acquisition"; LL.B. from the University of Delhi (2011-14), and B.A. (Hons.) from Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. He has also obtained P.G. Diploma in IPR from the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi. He has qualified UGC – NET examination and has been awarded ICSSR – Doctoral Fellowship. He has published six-plus articles and presented 9 plus papers in national and international seminars/conferences. He participated in several workshops on research methodology and teaching and learning.

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AN ANALYSIS OF RESERVATION POLICIES: EFFECTIVENESS IN ADDRESSING SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND FOSTERING EQUALITY

AUTHORED BY - ADV. AKHIL LALICHAN,
ADV. AADARSH PREMARAJ & ADV. BINOY JOHN
Bharata Mata School of Legal Studies, Choondy, Aluva, Kerala

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of social inequalities in India

India has a long history of social stratification, primarily influenced by the caste system, which has played a significant role in shaping societal hierarchies. Traditionally, this system classified people into different social groups, often determining their access to resources, education, and employment. Over time, this rigid structure led to systemic discrimination and exclusion of lower castes, especially Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Social inequalities in India exist in multiple dimensions, impacting access to education, employment, political representation, and economic opportunities. Some key areas of disparity include

1.1.1 Caste Based Discrimination

Many centuries ago, people of India were discriminated by their caste. Caste-based discrimination in India persists in education, employment, and social interactions, despite legal protections. Dalits and marginalized groups often face exclusion, violence, and limited opportunities.

1.1.2 Education inequality

Many centuries ago, people from marginalized communities were not allowed to get educated. Educational inequality in India stems from socioeconomic disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and caste-based discrimination. Rural and marginalized communities often lack access to quality education, modern resources, and efficient teachers.

1.1.3 Economic disparities

Economic disparities in India arise from unequal wealth distribution, limited

access to education, and employment gaps. Rural populations and marginalized communities often face poverty and deprive infrastructural facilities

1.1.4 Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination in India affects women in education, employment, and social rights. Patriarchal norms limit opportunities, leading to wage gaps, underrepresentation, and violence.

Social inequalities in India have deep historical roots and cannot be changed by lapse of time.

1.2 Concept of reservation and its purpose

1.2.1 Concept of reservation

Reservation in India is a policy of affirmative action designed to uplift historically disadvantaged communities by providing them with access to education, employment, and political representation. It ensures a quota-based system for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and recently Economically Weaker Sections among the general category.

This system came into force as a healing the wound of centuries of social discrimination and exclusion, specifically under the caste system. By offering reserved opportunities, the policy seeks to create a better world for marginalized groups, enabling them to participate in mainstream social and economic activities.

1.2.2 Purpose of reservation

1.2.2.1 Promoting social equality

Addressing caste, gender, and economic disparities through legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and grassroots initiatives can foster a better society. Empowering marginalized communities and ensuring equal rights will help build a more equitable nation.

1.2.2.2 Enhancing educational access

Reservation in education helps to bring up marginalized communities by giving quality learning opportunities. It erases historical injustices faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. Continuous reforms and improvements in infrastructure are needed to make education truly accessible to all.

1.2.2.3 Employment Opportunities for marginalized communities

Reservation provides marginalized communities with better employment opportunities in government and public sectors. It helps address historical

injustices faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. While it promotes workplace diversity, skill development and private-sector participation are essential for broader economic empowerment and equal opportunities

1.2.2.4 Ensuring political representation

Ensuring political representation requires diverse practices, reservation for marginalized groups, and active participation for better governance. Seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women in various legislatures to enhance their voice in decision-making. Strengthening democratic institutions can further promote equal representation and inclusive development.

1.2.2.5 Curbing caste-based discrimination

Curbing caste-based discrimination requires strict enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, educational reforms, and social awareness campaigns. Promoting equality through reservations, economic opportunities, and grassroots movements can help bridge the gap of caste division. Encouraging multiculturally sensitive society are crucial steps toward eliminating caste-based bias and ensuring social justice for all.

1.2.2.6 Economic inclusion

Reservation in India promotes economic inclusion by providing marginalized communities with access to education, employment, and job opportunities in government department. It helps bridge historical disparities faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. Strengthening skill development and expanding opportunities in the private sector can further enhance economic empowerment.

The reservation system in India is a significant step toward reducing social inequalities and fostering inclusive growth. A comprehensive approach, integrating economic assistance, skill development, and education, are essential components achieving true social and economic justice.

Chapter 2

Historical Evolution of the Caste Based Reservation System

2.1 Origin of the Caste System and its Social Impact

The origins of the caste system in India can be traced back to ancient times, emerging from early social and religious texts. Initially described in the Vedas, the system was conceived as a way to organize society into four primary categories—or varnas—based on occupational roles. These categories, namely the Brahmins (priests and scholars), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (traders and agriculturists), and Shudras (laborers and service providers), provided a framework for social order. Over time, however, this idealized model transformed into a complex and rigid social hierarchy. Local groupings known as jatis emerged, which were in-marriage and based largely on birth, eventually giving rise to thousands of distinct communities.

This evolution influenced various historical factors. The advent of the Aryans introduced new social dynamics that cross with indigenous practices, gradually fixed caste as a hereditary system. Later, during the medieval period and under colonial rule, British administrative practices further solidified and codified caste distinctions through census classifications and policies, often reinforcing and institutionalizing the inequalities that already existed.

The impact of the caste system in India has been profound and enduring. It has structured social relationships, influencing marriage, occupation, and community interactions. Lower-caste groups, particularly the Dalits (formerly referred to as “untouchables”), have historically faced systemic exclusion, discrimination, and violence. These practices have had lasting effects on economic opportunities, educational access, and political representation for millions of Indians. Despite modern legislative efforts and affirmative action policies aimed at redressing these disparities, caste continues to shape social identity and perpetuate inequality, especially in rural areas. In essence, the caste system remains a powerful force in India, affecting every facet of life from personal identity to national politics.

2.2 Pre-independence Movements for social justice

Before India achieved independence in 1947, numerous social reform movements arose to combat caste discrimination, untouchability, gender inequality, and other forms of oppression. Led by forward-thinking reformers, these movements were instrumental in promoting social justice and equality, shaping the nation's path toward a more inclusive society.

2.2.1 The Brahmo Samaj(1828)¹

Brahmo Samaj, established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828, was a reform movement advocating monotheism and social change. It opposed idol worship, caste discrimination, and harmful practices like sati. Emphasizing reason and morality, it played a vital role in modernizing Indian society and promoting progressive values.

2.2.2 Prarthana Samaj(1867)

Prarthana Samaj, founded in 1867 in Bombay, aimed at social and religious reform in India. It promoted monotheism, women's education, caste equality, and the abolition of social evils like child marriage. Influenced by Brahmo Samaj, it played a crucial role in modernizing Hindu society through progressive ideals and reforms.

2.2.3 Arya Samaj²

Arya Samaj, established by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, a Hindu progressive movement fosters Vedic teachings. It fights against idol worship, caste discrimination, and myths while support of education, gender equality, and social justice. Arya Samaj was instrumental in India's cultural revival and nationalist movements.

2.2.4. Satyashodhak Samaj

Satyashodhak Samaj, established by Jyotirao Phule in 1873, intended to eradicate caste discrimination and social injustice. It supported education, gender equality, and rights for marginalized communities. The movement against Brahminical dominance and promoted rational thinking, played a key role in social reform and empowerment of the oppressed in India.

2.2.5. Justice Movement

The Justice Movement, founded in 1916 by non-Brahmin leaders in Madras, sought social equality and political representation for marginalized communities. It opposed Brahmin dominance in government and education, advocating for reservations and reforms. This movement laid the foundation for the South Indian Justice Party and later Dravidian movements.

2.2.6. Self Respect Movement ³

The Self-Respect Movement, launched by E.V. Ramasamy (Periyar) in 1925, aimed to eradicate caste discrimination, promote gender equality, and challenge Brahminical dominance. It encouraged rational thinking, self-respect among non-Brahmins,

¹ Manishiq” Brahmo Samaj, History, Founder, Principle and Significance”

² Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica “ Arya Samaj”

³ Devendra” The Self-Respect Movement: A Century Of Social Justice And Its Continuing Relevance

and social reforms like inter-caste marriages. The movement played a crucial role in shaping Dravidian politics and Tamil identity.

2.2.7 Dalit Movement and Dr. B. R Ambedkar

The Dalit Movement, led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, aimed to uplift oppressed communities and eradicate caste-based discrimination. Ambedkar advocated for social justice, education, and political representation for Dalits. His efforts led to constitutional safeguards, including reservations. As the architect of India's Constitution, he championed equality and human rights.

2.2.8. Temple Entry Movements

2.2.8.1. Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-25)

Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–1925) was a non-violent protest in Kerala against caste-based discrimination, demanding temple entry rights for lower castes. Led by leaders like K. Kelappan and supported by Mahatma Gandhi, it marked a significant step in the social reform movement, promoting equality and challenging untouchability in Indian society.

2.2.8.2. Guruvayur Satyagraha.

Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931–1932) was a peaceful protest in Kerala demanding temple entry rights for Dalits at the Guruvayur Temple. Led by K. Kelappan and supported by Mahatma Gandhi, it aimed to end caste-based discrimination in religious spaces. Though it faced resistance, the movement raised awareness about social equality.

2.2.8.3. Kalaram Movement

The Kalaram Temple Entry Movement, led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1930, aimed to secure Dalit access to the Kalaram Temple in Nashik, Maharashtra. Thousands participated in this non-violent protest against caste-based discrimination, highlighting the need for equal religious rights and social justice in India's fight against untouchability.

2.2.9. Role of Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi played a pivotal role in India's independence movement through non-violent resistance. He led movements like Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India, advocating self-rule and social reforms. His principles of Satyagraha and Ahimsa united people against British rule, ultimately contributing to India's freedom in 1947.

These pre-independence movements challenged social hierarchies, promoted equality, and laid the foundation for social justice policies in independent India.

2.3. Role of Dr. B. R Ambedkar in drafting reservation policy

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, as the principal architect of Constitution of India, played a main lead in drafting the reservation policy. He advocated for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, ensuring reservations in education, employment, and legislatures. His efforts focused on social justice, equality, and empowerment of marginalized communities.

2.3.1 Advocacy for social justice and equality

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar hold a torch for social justice and equality , ensuring representation for marginalized communities. As the principle architect of the Constitution of India, he focused on reservations in education, employment, and legislatures to uplift Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, addressing historical discrimination.

2.3.2 The Poona Pact (1932) and Reservation in Politics

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar played a crucial role in securing political reservations for Dalits through the Poona Pact of 1932. Initially demanding separate electorates, he agreed to joint electorates with reserved seats after negotiations with Mahatma Gandhi. This pact ensured Dalit representation in legislatures, laying the foundation for India's reservation policy.

2.3.3. Reservation provisions in the Indian Constitution

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar ensured the inclusion of constitutional provisions for affirmative action in education, employment, and legislatures to support the advancement of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). These measures were aimed at fostering social justice and equality for historically disadvantaged groups.

2.3.4.Opposed to caste based discrimination

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar strongly opposed caste-based discrimination and advocated for reservations to uplift marginalized communities. He emphasized equal opportunities in education, employment, and politics for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, ensuring social justice through constitutional safeguards that aimed to eliminate caste-based inequalities and promote an inclusive society.

2.3.5. Long term vision and need for periodic society

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar envisioned reservations as a temporary measure to uplift marginalized communities, ensuring social and economic equality. He emphasized the need for periodic reviews to assess their effectiveness, preventing misuse and ensuring that reservations serve their intended purpose of empowering disadvantaged groups while

promoting long-term social justice.

2.4 Constitutional Provisions for reservation

2.4.1 Part XVI of the Constitution of India

Part XVI of the Indian Constitution provides special provisions for the representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes in legislatures, along with safeguards to promote their social, educational, and economic advancement.

2.4.2. Article 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution of India⁴

Article 15(4) empowers the state to create special provisions for the upliftment of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and socially and educationally backward communities, while Article 16(4) enables the government to implement reservations in public employment to promote equal opportunities and rectify historical inequalities..

2.4.3. Article 16(4A) of the Constitution of India⁵

Article 16(4A) of the Constitution of India promotes the state to give reservations in promotions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in government jobs. Introduced by the 77th Amendment,1995, it ensures adequate representation for these communities, addressing historical disadvantages and promoting social equality in public sector

2.4.4. Article 16(4B) of the Constitution of India⁶

Article 16(4B) of the Indian Constitution allows unfilled reserved vacancies for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes in government jobs to be carried forward to subsequent years. This provision ensures that reservation benefits are not lost due to annual limitations, promoting adequate representation of these communities.

2.4.5. Article 330 and 332 of the Constitution of India

Article 330 of the Indian Constitution reserves seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha, while Article 332 provides similar reservations in State Legislative Assemblies. These provisions ensure political representation for marginalized communities, enabling their participation in governance and decision-making to promote social and political equality.

⁴ M. P Jain Indian Constitutional Law p.no. 941,986 LexisNexis, Harayana,7th edn 2014

⁵ Ibid p.no.1005

⁶ M. P Jain Indian Constitutional Law p.no. 1008 LexisNexis, Harayana,7th edn 2014

2.4.6. Article 243 D of the Constitution of India

Article 243D of the Indian Constitution mandates reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women in Panchayati Raj institutions. It ensures their representation in local governance by reserving seats at all levels of the panchayat system, promoting inclusive decision-making and empowerment of marginalized communities in rural administration.

2.4.7. Article 243 T of the Constitution of India

Article 243T of the Constitution of India give seat for the reservation in municipality for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women. This ensures their representation in urban local bodies, promoting inclusive governance and empowering marginalized communities by giving them a participation in decision-making and urban development policies.

2.4.8. Article 335 of the Constitution of India

Article 335 of the Indian Constitution states that reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in government jobs must be balanced with administrative efficiency. It ensures that while providing representation to these communities, the functioning of public services remains effective and merit is not compromised in appointments and promotions.

2.5. Expansions of reservation in India

The reservation system in India was originally introduced to uplift historically marginalized communities by ensuring their access to education, employment, and political representation. Over the years, reservation policies have expanded through constitutional amendments, judicial interpretations, and government initiatives to include more categories beyond the initial focus on Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

2. 5.1. Initial Reservation Policy

India's initial reservation policy was introduced after independence to promote social justice by ensuring representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in education, employment, and governance. The Constitution of India (1950) provided for these reservations under Articles 15(4), 16(4), 330, and 332, allocating 15% for SCs and 7.5% for STs. Initially intended for 10 years, reservations were extended due to ongoing social and economic disparities.

2.5.2 Introduction of OBC Reservation ⁷

OBC reservation in India was introduced based on the Mandal Commission's recommendations (1979) to uplift socially and educationally backward classes. Implemented in 1990, it provided 27% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions, in addition to the existing quotas for SCs (15%) and STs (7.5%). The Indra Sawhney case (1992) upheld the reservation but introduced the creamy layer concept, excluding affluent OBCs. Over time, OBC reservations expanded to central educational institutions (2006) and various state-level policies, ensuring broader access to opportunities while maintaining the Supreme Court's 50% reservation cap on total quotas.

2.5.3. Reservation in private educational program

Reservation in private educational institutions was introduced to ensure social inclusion in higher education. The 93rd Constitutional Amendment (2006) enabled the government to mandate reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in private, unaided educational institutions, except minority-run institutions. The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act, 2006 implemented 27% OBC reservations in central universities like IITs and IIMs. This policy aimed to provide equal opportunities in education for marginalized communities, addressing historical disadvantages while balancing concerns over merit-based admissions in private institutions.

2.5.4. Expansion of economically weaker section

The 103rd Constitutional Amendment (2019) introduced 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in government jobs and educational institutions. Unlike caste-based reservations, EWS quotas apply to individuals from the general category with an annual family income below ₹8 lakh and limited land holdings. This was the first instance of economic criteria-based affirmative action in India. The Supreme Court upheld the amendment in 2022, marking a significant shift in reservation policy. EWS reservation aims to provide equal opportunities to financially disadvantaged individuals while maintaining the existing quotas for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

2.5.5. Expansion of political reservation

Political reservation in India ensures representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled

⁷ Mandal Commission Report by NCBC published in 1980 Volume I & II

Tribes (STs) in legislatures. The Constitution (1950) reserved seats in the Lok Sabha (Article 330) and State Assemblies (Article 332), initially for 10 years, but extended multiple times, now valid until 2030. Over time, political reservation expanded, including Panchayati Raj institutions (Article 243D) and urban local bodies (Article 243T) to strengthen grassroots democracy. The Women's Reservation Bill (2023) proposes 33% reservation for women in legislatures. These measures aim to promote political inclusion, empowering marginalized communities in governance and decision-making.

2.5.6. Reservations in promotions

Reservation in promotions aims to enhance career advancement for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in government jobs. The 77th Constitutional Amendment (1995) added Article 16(4A), allowing reservations in promotions for SCs and STs. The Supreme Court in *Indra Sawhney* (1992) initially ruled against it but later upheld promotion quotas with conditions like inadequate representation and administrative efficiency. The 85th Amendment (2001) enabled consequential seniority in promotions. Courts have since required states to justify such reservations with quantifiable data. Despite legal challenges, promotion reservations continue to support social mobility and representation in higher government positions.

2.5.7. State level expansion of reservation

Several Indian states have expanded reservation beyond the 50% cap set by the Supreme Court in *Indra Sawhney* (1992) to address regional social inequalities. Tamil Nadu (69%) secured its quota under the Ninth Schedule to protect it from judicial review. Maharashtra introduced Maratha reservation, but it was struck down in 2021. Haryana, Rajasthan, and Karnataka expanded reservations for Jats, Gujjars, and Lingayats, respectively. Many states have revised OBC and EWS quotas, reflecting local demographic needs. These expansions, though often challenged legally, highlight the ongoing demand for affirmative action tailored to state-specific socio-economic conditions.

2.5.8. Legal and Constitutional challenges

Several states in India have increased reservation limits beyond the 50% threshold set by the Supreme Court in the *Indra Sawhney* case (1992) to address regional disparities. Tamil Nadu (69%) safeguarded its quota by placing it under the Ninth Schedule to avoid judicial scrutiny. Maharashtra introduced a Maratha reservation, which was later invalidated in 2021. States like Haryana, Rajasthan, and Karnataka expanded quotas for Jats, Gujjars, and Lingayats, respectively. Many states have also revised OBC and EWS quotas based on local demographic needs. While these expansions face legal challenges, they

underscore the continued push for region-specific affirmative action.

2.5.9. Future Trends in Reservation Policies

Future reservation policies in India may evolve to address economic criteria, private sector inclusion, and dynamic social needs. With the EWS quota (2019) setting a precedent, there could be a shift toward economic-based affirmative action. Demands for private sector reservations and revising the creamy layer criteria for OBCs are gaining attention. The Women's Reservation Bill (2023) will reshape political representation. Legal challenges to exceeding the 50% cap may lead to constitutional amendments. Balancing social justice with meritocracy will drive future policies, ensuring that reservations remain effective, inclusive, and adaptable to changing socio-economic conditions.



Chapter 3

Implementation of Reservation Policies in India

3.1. Reservation in Education

Reservation in education is one of the key components of India's affirmative action policies, aimed at providing equal opportunities for marginalized communities in schools, colleges, and universities.

3.1.1. Reservation in Government Educational Institutions

Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) benefit from reserved seats in public universities, IITs, IIMs, and medical colleges.

3.1.2. Private Educational Institutions and Reservation

The 93rd Constitutional Amendment (2005) made it mandatory for private educational institutions (except minority-run institutions) to implement reservation policies. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 ensures 25% seats for disadvantaged students in private schools.

3.1.3. Reservation in Professional and Higher Education

Medical, engineering, and law colleges follow reservation policies to promote diversity and social inclusion. The introduction of EWS reservations has expanded opportunities for economically weaker sections of upper-caste communities.

3.1.4. Challenges in Implementation

3.1.4.1. Shortage of reserved category students

In premier institutions due to gaps in school-level education.

3.1.4.2. Protests and legal battles

Protests and legal battles over reservation policies, including demands for inclusion by Marathas, Patidars, and Jats.

3.1.4.3. Merit v. Reservation

Concerns about merit vs. reservation, with critics arguing that merit-based admissions should not be compromised.

3.1.4.4. Need for Economic-Based Affirmative Action

Some argue for more focus on financial need rather than caste alone.

3.1.5. Impact of Reservation in Education

3.1.5.1. Increased Enrollment

More students from marginalized communities have access to higher education, leading to better socio-economic mobility.

3.1.5.2. Greater Representation

Diversity in universities and professional courses helps break historical barriers.

3.1.5.3. Empowerment of Women

SC/ST and OBC women benefit from intersectional reservations, leading to better gender representation in education.

3.1.6. Government Initiatives to Support Reserved Categories

Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes for SC, ST, and OBC students. National Fellowship for SC/ST students pursuing higher studies (Ph.D. and M.Phil). Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Hostels for SC/ST students. Coaching schemes help marginalized students compete in entrance exams for IITs, IIMs, and civil services.

3.2. Reservation in employment

3.2.1. Reservation Quotas in Government Jobs

The Indian Constitution gives employment reservations for all reserved categories in central and state government services.

3.2.2. Scope of Reservation in Employment

It is Applicable to Central and State Government jobs, Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), and government-aided institutions but Not applicable in the private sector.

3.2.3. Promotion and Reservation

SCs and STs benefit from reservation in promotions (Article 16(4A) of the Constitution). OBCs do not have reservation in promotions but benefit at the entry-level. The Supreme Court has ruled that promotion-based reservations must be backed by data on inadequate representation.

3.2.4. Reservation in Contractual and Outsourced Jobs

With contract-based hiring increasing, there are concerns that reservation policies do not cover temporary or outsourced jobs, reducing their impact.

3.2.5. The Demand for Reservation in the Private Sector

There is increasing pressure to extend job reservations to private companies, particularly in multinational corporations, IT firms, and large industries. Some states have introduced laws mandating local hiring quotas, but there is no nationwide reservation policy in the private Employment

3.2.6. Employment Trends and Challenges

3.2.6.1. Underrepresentation in higher positions

While reservations help at the entry-level, SC/ST/OBC representation declines in senior administrative roles.

3.2.6.2. Limited scope in high-paying industries

Reserved candidates have fewer opportunities in private industries like IT, finance, and multinational corporations.

3.2.6.3. Impact of privatization

As more government organizations move towards contractual employment and outsourcing, the impact of job reservations is shrinking.

3.2.7. Government Initiatives to Support Reserved Categories

To strengthen employment opportunities for SCs, STs, and OBCs, the government has introduced. Special recruitment drives to fill backlog vacancies in reserved categories. Pre-exam coaching centers for civil services and public sector exams were initiated.

3.3. Political representation and reserved constituencies

3.3.1. Constitutional Provisions for Political Reservation

3.3.1.1. Article 330 and 332

Provide reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Lok Sabha (Parliament) and State Legislative Assemblies.

3.3.1.2. Article 243D and 243T

Mandate reservation for SCs, STs, and women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (local bodies).

3.3.2. Reserved Constituencies in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies

84 out of 543 Lok Sabha seats are reserved: SCs: 47 seats, STs: 37 seats. Similar reservations exist in State Legislative Assemblies, ensuring political voice for marginalized group.

3.3.3. Political Reservation in Local Governance

SCs, STs, and OBCs get reserved seats in gram panchayats, municipalities, and municipal corporations. One-third of the total seats in local bodies are reserved for women, including SC/ST quotas.

3.3.4. Impact of Political Reservation

3.3.4.1. Improved Representation

SC/ST leaders can advocate for the rights and policies benefiting their communities.

3.3.4.2. Social Empowerment

Encourages greater political participation among historically excluded groups.

3.3.4.3. Local Development

Reserved constituencies often see better policy focus on marginalized areas.

3.3.5. Challenges and Criticism

3.3.5.1. Limited Reservation for OBCs

Unlike SCs/STs, OBCs do not have reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies.

3.3.5.2. Dominance of Political Dynasties

Some reserved seats are repeatedly won by powerful political families, limiting opportunities for new leaders.

3.3.5.3. Dependency on Reserved Seats

Some argue that long-term reservation discourages self-sufficiency and competition in politics.

3.4. Recent Policy changes and amendment

India's reservation policies have undergone significant transformations to address evolving socio-economic challenges. Recent amendments and policy changes reflect efforts to balance historical injustices with contemporary needs.

3.4.1. Introduction of Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) Reservation

103rd Constitutional Amendment Act (2019): This amendment introduced a 10% reservation in public employment and educational institutions for EWS among the general category, marking a shift towards economic criteria in affirmative action.

3.4.2. Sub-Categorization within Scheduled Castes (SCs)

Telangana's Sub-Categorization (2025): In February 2025, Telangana announced criteria for sub-categorizing SCs to ensure equitable distribution of reservation benefits among sub-groups.

3.4.3. Judicial Review and Discussions

Supreme Court's Perspective (2025): The Supreme Court highlighted the expanding scope of reservation policies, likening them to a "swelling balloon," and

emphasized the need for a re-evaluation to balance social justice with meritocracy.

Parliamentary Considerations: The apex court suggested that it is within Parliament's purview to assess and potentially reform the reservation system, especially after 75 years of its implementation.



Chapter 4

Merits of the Caste based reservation

4.1 Social Upliftment of marginalized communities

4.1.1. Addressing historical discrimination

Reservations provide equal opportunities to groups that faced oppression under the caste system. It also helps bridge the socio-economic gap created by centuries of exclusion.

4.1.2. Ensuring social representation

Empowers marginalized communities by ensuring fair access to education and jobs. Political reservations enable their voices to be heard in governance and policy-making.

4.1.3 Breaking the cycle of poverty

Provides stable career opportunities by improving economic conditions for future generations. Also enables social mobility, reducing dependence on low-paying, caste-based occupations.

4.1.4 Strengthening constitutional values

Upholds the principles of equality and justice, as guaranteed in the Indian Constitution. Ensures that marginalized groups get a fair start, promoting inclusive growth.

4.2. Increased access to education and employment opportunities

4.2.1. Improved access to education

Reserved seats in schools, colleges, and universities allow Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) to pursue higher education. Helps students from underprivileged backgrounds enter prestigious institutions like IITs, IIMs, and medical colleges. Provides scholarships and financial aid, reducing dropout rates and ensuring educational continuity.

4.2.2. Greater employment opportunities

Reservation in government jobs and public sector units (PSUs) ensures fair representation in administrative and decision-making roles. Promotes economic stability by providing secure employment to historically disadvantaged groups. Encourages private sector diversity, as many companies now focus on inclusive hiring practices.

4.2.3. Breaking generational poverty

Education and employment opportunities create social mobility, allowing future generations to access better living conditions. Reduces dependence on low-paying, caste-based traditional occupations.

4.3. Reduction of historical discrimination and social justice

4.3.1. Addressing historical oppression

The caste system denied Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) access to education, employment, and social participation for centuries. Reservation policies help rectify this by providing fair opportunities in education, government jobs, and political representation.

4.3.2. Promoting equal opportunities

Ensures that historically disadvantaged groups get a level playing field in society. Encourages social mobility, helping individuals rise above their historically assigned socio-economic status.

4.3.3. Enhancing representation in governance

Reserved seats in legislatures, local bodies, and government institutions give marginalized communities a voice in policymaking. Helps in the creation of laws and policies that address the needs of underprivileged groups.

4.3.4 Creating an inclusive society

Reduces caste-based exclusion by integrating people from all backgrounds into educational institutions, workplaces, and leadership roles. Challenges social stereotypes and fosters acceptance, weakening caste-based prejudices over time.

4.4 Promotion of political participation and representation

4.4.1. Securing Political Representation

Reserved seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and Local Bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities) promising their full participation in policymaking and governance.

4.4.2. Empowering Underrepresented Communities

This provision allows historically marginalized groups to engage in the decision-making process, allowing the creation of policies that mainly deal with the social and economic challenges faced by disadvantaged communities.

4.4.3. Strengthening democracy

Encourages political participation among underprivileged groups, fostering greater interest in governance and leadership roles. Reduces elite dominance in politics, ensuring diverse perspectives in legislative bodies.

4.4.4. Policy reforms and development

Leaders from marginalized communities advocate for welfare schemes, social reforms, and economic development benefiting disadvantaged groups. It also leads to inclusive policymaking, addressing long-standing social and economic disparities.



Chapter 5

Demerits of Caste based reservation

5.1. Debate on meritocracy v. Affirmative action

5.1.1. Perceived Compromise on Meritocracy

Critics argue that reservation prioritizes caste over individual merit, potentially leading to less qualified candidates securing educational and job opportunities. In competitive fields like medicine, engineering, and civil services, merit-based selection is crucial for maintaining high standards of performance.

5.1.2. Efficiency and Productivity Concerns

Opponents believe that excessive reliance on reservations can reduce competence and efficiency in government institutions and public services. In workplaces, merit-based hiring is seen as essential for maintaining global competitiveness and innovation.

5.1.3. The Need for Balancing Social Justice and Competence

Supporters of affirmative action argue that historical oppression has denied marginalized groups equal opportunities, making reservations necessary for leveling the playing field. A balance between merit-based selection and social justice policies is essential to ensure both equality and efficiency in education and employment.

5.1.4. Calls for Economic-Based Reservation

Many advocate for economic criteria over caste-based reservations, ensuring that affirmative action benefits the truly disadvantaged rather than those already socio-economically stable. The introduction of the EWS (Economically Weaker Sections) quota in 2019 reflects a shift toward this approach.

5.2. The creamy layer concept and its Impact on OBC

5.2.1. Unequal Distribution of Benefits

The wealthier and well-educated OBC families continue to benefit from reservations, limiting opportunities for the most disadvantaged within OBCs. Marginalized subgroups within OBCs struggle to compete with the better-off sections, leading to an uneven upliftment.

5.2.2. Ambiguity in Implementation

The definition of the creamy layer is based on income criteria, currently set at ₹8 lakh per annum, but this threshold often fails to reflect social and educational backwardness. Different states interpret the creamy layer criteria differently, leading to

inconsistencies in reservation policies.

5.2.3. Limited Impact on Social Justice

While the creamy layer concept prevents elite sections within OBCs from monopolizing benefits, it does not fully address the deep-rooted inequalities within society. Many believe that caste-based reservations should also consider social and educational backwardness, not just economic status.

5.2.4. Demands for Review and Expansion

Several political and social groups demand removal or revision of the creamy layer criteria, arguing that caste-based discrimination persists despite economic upliftment. The demand for OBC reservations in promotions and revisions in creamy layer income limits remains a contentious issue.

5.3. Exclusion of economically disadvantaged upper caste

5.3.1. Lack of Support for Poor Upper Castes

Reservation policies focus on historical caste-based discrimination rather than economic disadvantage, leaving many financially struggling upper-caste individuals without benefits. Despite poverty and lack of resources, upper-caste students and job seekers must compete solely on merit, often against reserved category candidates with more support.

5.3.2. Growing Demand for Economic-Based Reservation

Many argue that affirmative action should be based on economic status, ensuring benefits reach the truly disadvantaged, regardless of caste. The Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation (introduced in 2019) was a response to this issue, but its 10% quota remains lower than what other reserved categories receive.

5.3.3. Increased Social and Economic Frustration

The absence of support for poor upper-caste students and professionals leads to resentment and frustration, fueling debates over reverse discrimination. Critics argue that reservation policies, instead of eradicating inequality, have created a new form of social division based on caste-based entitlements.

5.3.4. Need for a More Inclusive Approach

A shift toward economic criteria in reservations could ensure fairness while maintaining social justice objectives. Policies must focus on uplifting all economically weaker sections, regardless of caste, to promote true equality and national progress.

5.4. Social and Political conflicts over reservation method

5.4.1. Rise in Caste-Based Tensions

Reservation policies, while aimed at reducing social inequalities, have sometimes deepened caste divisions, leading to resentment and conflicts among communities. Groups from unreserved categories often feel discriminated against, arguing that reservations create reverse discrimination.

5.4.2. Growing Demand for Inclusion in Reserved Categories

Various communities, including Jats (Haryana), Marathas (Maharashtra), Patidars (Gujarat), and Kapus (Andhra Pradesh), have launched mass movements demanding OBC or SC/ST status to access reservation benefits. These demands often lead to violent protests, political negotiations, and court cases, disrupting social harmony.

5.4.3. Political Exploitation of Reservation Policies

Political parties often use reservation promises as a tool to gain electoral support, leading to vote-bank politics rather than meaningful policy reforms. The periodic expansion of reservations without addressing structural economic and social reforms raises concerns about policy effectiveness.

5.4.4. Legal Challenges and Policy Uncertainty

Several reservation policies have faced constitutional challenges in courts, leading to legal uncertainties. The Supreme Court's 50% cap on reservations (Indra Sawhney case, 1992) is frequently challenged by state governments expanding quotas beyond this limit.

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Chapter 6

New Developments in Reservation Policies

6.1. Introduction of economically weaker section

6.1.1. 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act

The 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 2019 came up with a 10% reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in education and employment sectors in public. It changes Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution to give opportunities for economically disadvantaged people from the general category, while keeping the existing reservations for SCs, STs, and OBCs.

6.1.2. Impact of EWS Reservation

6.1.2.1. Greater educational access

The EWS reservation has significantly improved educational access for economically weaker sections from unreserved categories. By providing a 10% quota in higher education institutions, it enables students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds to secure admissions in reputed colleges and universities. This policy reduces financial barriers and increases opportunities for quality education, fostering social mobility. Additionally, it ensures fair representation in premier institutions, helping economically weaker students compete on a more level playing field. Over time, this reservation can contribute to reducing economic disparities by equipping beneficiaries with better educational qualifications and improved career prospects.

6.1.2.2. Employment Benefits

The EWS reservation provides significant employment benefits by ensuring a 10% quota for economically weaker individuals in government jobs. This policy enhances job opportunities for financially disadvantaged candidates from unreserved categories, enabling them to compete more effectively in public sector recruitment. By addressing economic barriers, it promotes equal access to stable employment and career growth. Over time, this reservation fosters economic upliftment, reducing income inequality and improving livelihoods. Additionally, it helps create a more diverse and inclusive workforce, ensuring that economic disadvantage does not hinder individuals from securing government positions and contributing to national development.

6.1.2.3. Shift in reservation policy

The EWS reservation marks a significant shift in India's reservation policy by introducing economic criteria as a basis for affirmative action. Unlike traditional

reservations focused on social and caste-based disadvantages, this policy benefits financially weaker individuals from unreserved categories. It broadens the scope of affirmative action, recognizing economic hardship as a factor in social inequality. This shift reflects an evolving approach toward social justice, balancing caste-based and economic considerations. While it expands opportunities for disadvantaged groups, it also raises debates on its implementation, long-term impact, and effectiveness in addressing economic disparities without undermining existing caste-based reservations.

6.1.3. Controversies and Challenges

6.1.3.1. Violation of 50% reservation cap

The EWS reservation has sparked controversy as it breaches the Supreme Court's 50% cap on reservations set in the Indra Sawhney judgment (1992). By adding a 10% quota for Economically Weaker Sections, the total reservation in many states now exceeds this limit, raising constitutional concerns. Critics argue that exceeding the cap undermines the principle of merit-based opportunities and sets a precedent for further expansion. Supporters, however, justify it as addressing economic inequality. The issue has led to legal challenges, with debates on whether economic criteria alone justify breaking the established reservation ceiling while maintaining fairness in public opportunities.

6.1.3.2. Exclusion of SCs, STs and OBCs from EWS benefits

A major controversy surrounding the EWS reservation is the exclusion of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) from its benefits. Critics argue that this policy assumes these groups are already covered by existing reservations, ignoring the economic struggles within these communities. Many believe economic weakness exists across all castes and should be addressed inclusively. This exclusion has led to legal and political debates, with some questioning whether it aligns with the principles of equality. Supporters, however, maintain that EWS aims to uplift financially weaker individuals from unreserved categories who previously lacked reservation benefits.

6.1.3.3. Difficulties in implementation

The implementation of EWS reservation faces several challenges, including the accurate identification of beneficiaries. Determining economic eligibility based on income and asset criteria is complex, often leading to discrepancies and potential misuse. Ensuring transparency in issuing EWS certificates is another concern, as fraudulent claims may arise. Additionally, many institutions and government departments lack proper mechanisms to verify financial status effectively. The policy also places an administrative burden on authorities, requiring efficient monitoring and enforcement. Moreover, the

availability of reserved seats and job vacancies remains limited, raising doubts about whether the intended benefits truly reach the most deserving individuals.

6.1.4. Future of EWS Reservation

6.1.4.1. Possible expansion to private sector.

The future of EWS reservation may include its extension to the private sector, similar to ongoing discussions about expanding caste-based reservations. Advocates argue that private companies should also provide opportunities for economically weaker individuals, ensuring a level playing field beyond government jobs and educational institutions. However, implementing such a policy raises concerns about merit, business autonomy, and economic impact. Private firms may resist mandatory reservations, fearing reduced competitiveness. If introduced, proper guidelines and incentives would be needed to balance social justice with economic growth. The debate continues, shaping the evolving role of affirmative action in India's employment landscape.

6.1.4.2. Revaluation of economic criteria.

The future of EWS reservation may involve re-evaluating its economic criteria to ensure fairness and effectiveness. The current income limit and asset-based conditions have faced criticism for being either too high or inconsistently applied. Periodic reviews may be necessary to adjust eligibility thresholds based on inflation, regional disparities, and economic conditions. A more precise framework, including dynamic assessment methods, could help target genuinely disadvantaged individuals. Additionally, integrating social and financial indicators may improve the policy's impact. Regular assessments and policy refinements will be crucial in ensuring that EWS reservation effectively benefits those in genuine economic need.

6.1.4.3. Legal and Political debate.

The future of EWS reservation will likely be shaped by ongoing legal and political debates. Legal challenges question its validity, particularly its breach of the 50% reservation cap and the exclusion of SCs, STs, and OBCs. The judiciary's interpretation will determine its constitutional standing. Politically, parties have differing views, with some advocating expansion while others call for revisions to ensure fairness. Public opinion also influences the discourse, as economic-based reservations shift traditional affirmative action policies. Future legal rulings and political decisions will play a crucial role in determining whether EWS reservation remains, expands, or undergoes significant modifications.

6.2. Judicial review on reservation limits and 50% cap debate

6.2.1. The Indra Sawhney Judgment (1992) and the 50% cap

The Indra Sawhney judgment (1992) is a landmark Supreme Court ruling that upheld caste-based reservations while establishing a 50% cap on total reservations to maintain meritocracy. The Court ruled that reservations should not exceed this limit except in extraordinary circumstances, ensuring a balance between affirmative action and equal opportunity. This decision shaped India's reservation policy, preventing excessive quotas that could undermine fairness in education and employment. However, the introduction of the 10% EWS reservation in 2019 challenged this cap, sparking legal and political debates on whether economic criteria justify exceeding the established reservation ceiling in public institutions.

6.2.2. Breach of the 50% cap: The Maratha quota case

The Maratha Quota case (Jaishri Laxmanrao Patil v. State of Maharashtra, 2021) addressed the breach of the 50% reservation cap set by the Indra Sawhney judgment. Maharashtra had granted reservations to Marathas under the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) category, pushing total reservations beyond 50%. The Supreme Court struck down the law, ruling that extraordinary circumstances did not justify exceeding the cap. This judgment reaffirmed the constitutional limit on reservations, emphasizing merit-based opportunities. However, debates continue, especially after the introduction of the EWS quota, which has challenged the rigidity of the 50% reservation ceiling.

6.2.3. EWS quota and the exception to 50% rule

The EWS quota created an exception to the 50% reservation limit set by the Indra Sawhney ruling (1992). In the case of Janhit Abhiyan v. Union of India (2022), the Supreme Court upheld the 103rd Constitutional Amendment, affirming a 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) beyond the existing quotas. The Court concluded that economic criteria could be a legitimate basis for affirmative action, differentiating it from caste-based reservations. This ruling set a legal precedent, allowing reservations to exceed the 50% cap under specific conditions. However, it led to debates regarding equality, constitutional interpretation, and the future implications for India's reservation system.

6.2.4. State level exceptions and the ongoing debate

Several states have attempted to exceed the 50% reservation cap, citing unique socio-economic conditions. Tamil Nadu, for instance, implemented 69% reservation under the Ninth Schedule to bypass judicial scrutiny. Similarly, states like Maharashtra and Rajasthan have sought higher quotas for specific communities, leading to legal challenges. The

Supreme Court has generally upheld the Indra Sawhney judgment but has made exceptions, such as for the EWS quota. The ongoing debate revolves around whether economic, regional, or historical factors justify exceeding the cap. Future legal interpretations and policy decisions will determine how flexible India's reservation framework remains in balancing equity and merit.

6.2.5. The way forward : Possible legal and policy reform

6.2.5.1. Need for constitutional clarity.

The evolving reservation framework requires constitutional clarity to address exceptions like the EWS quota and state-level deviations. A clear legal framework or judicial ruling can define limits, criteria, and periodic reviews. This will ensure a balanced approach, maintaining social justice while upholding meritocracy and consistency in India's reservation policies.

6.2.5.2. Judicial and Legislative Reforms

Parliament may need to debate and redefine reservation limits based on current socio-economic conditions.

6.2.5.3. Balancing Affirmative Action with Meritocracy.

Policymakers must strike a balance between inclusive policies and efficiency in governance.

6.3. Sub categorization of OBC for equitable distribution

The sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) aims to ensure fairer distribution of reservation benefits among different groups within the 27% OBC quota. Over time, it was observed that socially and educationally advanced OBC communities were disproportionately benefiting from reservations, leaving the most marginalized groups behind.

6.3.1. Rationale for Sub-Categorization

6.3.1.1. Unequal Distribution of Benefits

A few dominant OBC groups have secured a significant share of reservations, while smaller, more marginalized groups remain underrepresented.

6.3.1.2. Judicial Recognition

The Indra Sawhney judgment (1992) allowed for further classification within OBCs to ensure equitable distribution.

6.3.1.3. Empirical Evidence

Studies show that only a few affluent OBC castes (such as Yadavs, Kurmis, and Jats in some states) dominate education and jobs, leaving others with minimal benefits.

Chapter 7

Comparative Analysis with Global Affirmative Policies

7.1. Reservation Policies in the United States

Unlike India's caste-based reservation system, the United States follows affirmative action policies, which aim to address historical discrimination and promote equal opportunities for marginalized groups, particularly in education and employment.

7.1.1. Historical Background

Affirmative action policies were introduced during the Civil Rights Movement to counter racial discrimination against African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and other minorities.

7.1.2. Features of Reservation Policies in the United States (Affirmative Action)

The reservation policies in the U.S., commonly known as affirmative action, have distinct features aimed at addressing historical discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities in education and employment.

7.1.2.1. Focus on Historically Disadvantaged Groups

Targets African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and women who have faced systemic discrimination. Encourages diversity in higher education, government jobs, and private sector employment.

7.1.2.2. Race-Conscious Admissions in Education

Universities, especially Ivy League institutions, previously considered race as a factor in admissions to promote diversity. Quotas were prohibited, but a holistic review process was allowed.

7.1.2.3. Employment-Based Affirmative Action

Federal contractors and large corporations must ensure fair representation of minorities and women in hiring. Equal Opportunity Employment (EOE) laws require proactive steps to eliminate workplace discrimination. No fixed job reservations, but companies must create policies that promote diversity and inclusion.

7.1.2.4. Native American Reservations

Land-based reservations provide self-governance, tax benefits, and educational support to Native American tribes. Tribal sovereignty allows Native Americans to manage their own legal, social, and economic systems. Special policies for education scholarships, business grants, and employment opportunities were accorded.

7.1.2.5. Shift Towards Socio-Economic Affirmative Action

With legal restrictions on race-based preferences, institutions are considering income, first-generation college status, and disadvantaged backgrounds instead. This approach aims to ensure fairness without explicit racial quotas.

7.1.3. Legal and political challenges

7.1.3.1. State-Level Bans on Affirmative Action

Several states, including California, Michigan, Florida, and Washington, have banned affirmative action in public education and employment through referendums.

7.1.3.2. Reverse Discrimination Claims

Affirmative action has led to lawsuits from White and Asian-American students who argue they face disadvantages in college admissions and job applications. Critics argue that race-based preferences violate the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

7.1.3.3. Conservative vs. Liberal Divide

Conservative View: Many Republicans argue that affirmative action leads to reverse discrimination and that merit-based selection should be the only criterion.

Liberal View: Many Democrats support affirmative action, arguing it is necessary to correct historical injustices and ensure equal opportunities.

7.1.3.4. Public Opinion and Political Backlash

Public support for race-based affirmative action has declined, especially after high-profile court cases. In 2020, California voters rejected Proposition 16, which aimed to reinstate affirmative action.

7.1.3.5. Shift Toward Socioeconomic-Based Policies

With legal restrictions on race-conscious policies, institutions are shifting towards economic based affirmative action, favoring low-income students and first-generation college applicants instead.

7.2. Quota System in Brazil

7.2.1 Introduction

Brazil has implemented affirmative action policies, including quota systems, to address racial and socio-economic inequalities caused by historical discrimination, particularly against Afro-Brazilians, Indigenous people, and low-income groups. These policies aim to promote greater representation in education, employment, and government institutions

7.2.2. Features of quota system

7.2.2.1. Reservation in Higher Education

50% of seats in federal universities are reserved for underprivileged students. Priority are given to Students from public schools. Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous students (self-declared). Low-income students from families earning less than 1.5 times the minimum wage. Within these quotas, there are sub-quotas for racial minorities, ensuring better representation.

7.2.2.2. Quotas in Public Sector Jobs

20% of federal government jobs are reserved for Afro-Brazilians. Some state and municipal governments also implement similar reservation policies. Ensures diversity in public administration and policymaking.

7.2.2.3. Race and Socio-Economic Based Criteria

Unlike India's caste-based reservations, Brazil's system considers both racial identity and economic background. Focuses on historically marginalized groups, including Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous communities.

7.2.2.4. Legal and Constitutional Backing

In 2012, Brazil's Supreme Federal Court upheld quotas as constitutional, recognizing them as necessary for social justice. The 2022 review of the Quota Law reinforced the importance of affirmative action while addressing issues like fraud in racial self-identification.

7.2.2.5. Periodic Review and Adjustments

The Quota Law is reviewed every 10 years to evaluate its effectiveness. Possible adjustments include shifting towards a more socio-economic-based approach rather than focusing primarily on race.

7.3. Lessons for India from International Experience in Reservation Policies

India can draw valuable lessons from global affirmative action policies, especially from countries like the United States, Brazil, and South Africa, which have implemented various forms of reservations and quota systems to address historical inequalities. While India's caste-based reservation system has unique socio-political contexts, these international experiences offer insights into policy effectiveness, challenges, and possible reforms.

7.3.1. Need for a Balanced Approach

Move towards a mix of affirmative action and merit-based selection, ensuring opportunities for disadvantaged groups without completely overlooking meritocracy.

7.3.2. Inclusion of Socioeconomic Criteria

While caste remains a significant marker of disadvantage, India can

consider expanding income-based reservations, ensuring that economically weaker individuals across castes benefit.

7.3.3. Stricter Implementation and Fraud Prevention

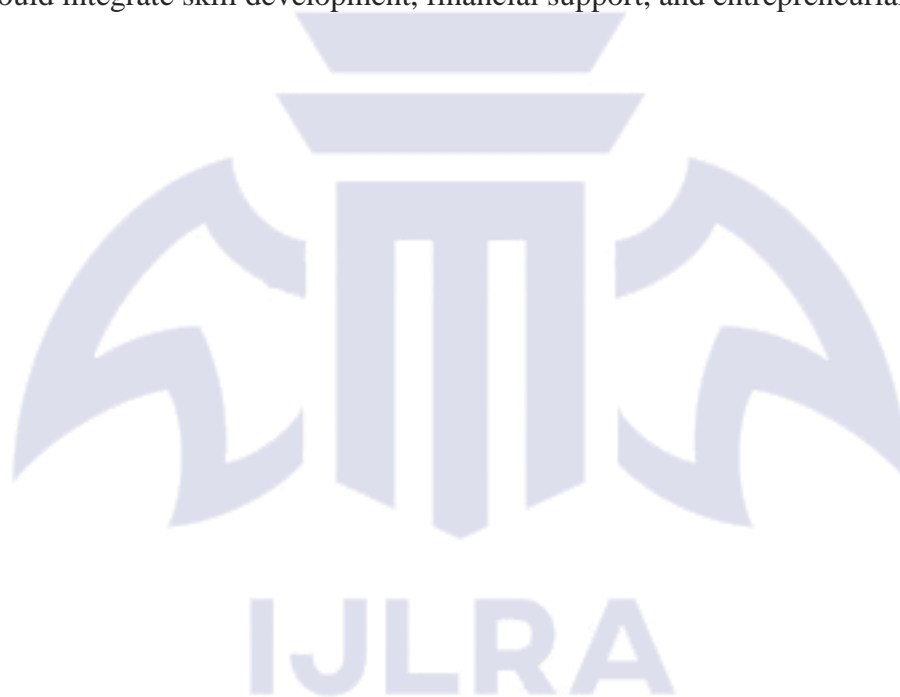
Strengthen monitoring mechanisms to prevent misuse of reservations, ensuring benefits reach the truly marginalized.

7.3.4. Periodic Policy Review and Adjustments

Conduct regular socio-economic surveys to assess the impact of reservations and modify policies based on data rather than fixed quotas.

7.3.5. Gradual Transition envisages More Inclusive Model

Instead of focusing solely on job and education quotas. The reservation policies should integrate skill development, financial support, and entrepreneurial incentive



Chapter 8

The future of reservation policies in India

8.1. The need for a socio economic based affirmative action

A socio-economic-based affirmative action policy ensures support for all disadvantaged groups, regardless of caste. It addresses financial hardships, providing equal opportunities in education and employment. By focusing on economic and social disadvantages, this approach promotes inclusivity, reduces inequality, and ensures that benefits reach the most deserving individuals in society.

8.1.1. Limitations of the Current Caste-Based System

8.1.1.1 Exclusion of Economically Disadvantaged Upper Castes

The Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) quota, introduced in 2019, acknowledges that poverty exists across all castes. However, before EWS, poor individuals from general categories were excluded from government benefits and reservations, despite facing financial hardships.

8.1.1.2. Unequal Benefit Distribution within Reserved Categories

The "creamy layer" issue in OBC reservations shows that better-off individuals within reserved categories often access benefits more than the poorest and most marginalized. This has led to internal inequalities within SC, ST, and OBC groups, with rural and extremely poor sections still left behind.

8.1.1.3. Caste Alone Does Not Define Disadvantage Anymore

Economic hardship affects low-income individuals across all communities. Caste discrimination is still prevalent but should not be the only basis for affirmative action.

8.1.2. Why Socioeconomic-Based Affirmative Action is Necessary

8.1.2.1. Ensuring Justice for All Disadvantaged Groups

By focusing on poverty, access to education, and employment opportunities, and affirmative action can help truly the needy, irrespective of caste.

8.1.2.2. Strengthening Social Harmony

Caste-based reservations have sometimes created division and political conflicts. A system that prioritizes economic factors can reduce resentment among non-reserved categories and promote national unity.

8.1.2.3. Addressing Rural and Regional Disparities

Many tribal and backward areas still lack access to education,

healthcare, and employment. Socioeconomic criteria would ensure that the most underprivileged regions get priority, rather than only focusing on caste identity.

8.1.3. Key Features of a Socioeconomic-Based Affirmative Action Model

8.1.3.1 Combining Caste and Economic Status

Reservations should consider both caste-based historical discrimination and present-day economic hardship. A multi-layered approach can ensure that both lower castes and poor individuals from all backgrounds get fair opportunities.

8.1.3.2. Expanding Benefits Beyond Quotas

Instead of just focusing on reserved seats, policies should include financial aid for poor students, (scholarships, fee waivers), skill development programs for low-income individuals, and incentives for private sector hiring of disadvantaged groups

8.1.3.3. Periodic Review of Beneficiary Data

Socioeconomic data should be collected regularly to assist policies based on real needs. This would prevent misuse and ensure targeted benefits for the most marginalized.

8.2. Alternative Measures for Social Equity in India

While reservation policies have played a crucial role in uplifting marginalized communities, they alone cannot eliminate social inequalities. To achieve comprehensive social equity, India needs alternative and complementary measures that address economic, educational, and employment disparities at a structural level.

8.2.1. Strengthening Primary and Higher Education Access

8.2.1.1. Improving Government Schools and Colleges

provide a better infrastructure, appoint qualified teachers, and enhance digital learning facilities in rural and underdeveloped areas. More funding should be granted public schools to reduce dependency on private institutions.

8.2.1.2. Increase Scholarships and Financial Aid

Need-based scholarships, fee waivers, and interest-free loans for students from low-income families should be made available. Special incentives should be granted for girls, first-generation learners, and students from backward regions.

8.2.1.3. Bridge Programs for First-Generation Learners

These programs provide extra academic supported to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, helping them level the playing field and succeed in higher education. sector

8.2.2. Skill Development and Vocational Training

8.2.2.1. Industry-Specific Training Programs

Government-sponsored training should be provided in sectors like IT, manufacturing, healthcare, and renewable energy to increase employability. Collaboration with private industries should be encouraged to create job-oriented skill programs.

8.2.2.2. Rural and Tribal Livelihood Development

Promote self-employment, through traditional handicrafts, and micro-enterprises with financial and skill-based support. Also strengthen agricultural productivity with technology and modern techniques.

8.2.3. Economic Upliftment Programs

8.2.3.1. Targeted Financial Assistance for the Poor

Expansion of Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) was executed for the economically disadvantaged. Special financial aid was granted for women entrepreneurs and small businesses in backward areas.

8.2.3.2. Reservation in Private Sector Employment

Instead of mandatory quotas, were given to private companies hiring candidates from disadvantaged groups. That tax benefits for companies were also granted that practice inclusive hiring.

8.2.4. Political and Social Empowerment

8.2.4.1. Strengthening Grassroots Leadership

Training programs for local leaders from marginalized communities were organised to ensure active participation in governance. More representation was granted to decision-making bodies in reserved constituencies beyond just reserved constituencies.

8.2.4.2. Anti-Discrimination Laws and Strict Enforcement

Stronger implementation of laws were instituted against caste and gender discrimination in workplaces, education, and society. Public awareness campaigns were organized to promote social inclusion and harmony

8.2.5. Periodic Review and Policy Adjustments

Conducts regular socio-economic surveys to assess whether policies are reaching the truly needy. Flexibility in affirmative action policies, ensure a balance between historical injustices and present-day economic realities.

8.3. Policy Recommendations for a Balanced and Inclusive Reservation System in India

India's reservation system has been instrumental in uplifting marginalized communities, but it needs reforms to ensure fairness, efficiency, and inclusivity. A balanced approach should focus on social justice while minimizing disadvantages for other sections of society. Here are some policy recommendations for a more equitable and sustainable reservation system:

8.3.1. Introducing a Socioeconomic-Based Affirmative Action Model

Combine caste-based and economic-based reservations to ensure that benefits reach the truly disadvantaged. Expand the "creamy layer" exclusion principle across all reserved categories (SC, ST, OBC) to prevent well-off individuals from repeatedly benefiting. Increase support for EWS reservations while ensuring they do not dilute opportunities for historically marginalized communities.

8.3.2. Expanding Opportunities Beyond Quotas

8.3.2.1. Strengthening Primary and Higher Education Access

Improve government schools and colleges with better infrastructure, teacher training, and digital resources. Provide need-based scholarships, free coaching, and mentorship programs for disadvantaged students.

8.3.2.2 Enhancing Skill Development and Employment Support

Establish vocational training centers targeting marginalized communities. Introduce private sector incentives for hiring underprivileged candidates rather than imposing mandatory quotas.

8.3.3. Ensuring Periodic Review and Data-Driven Policy Adjustments

Conduct regular caste and socio-economic surveys to assess the impact of reservations. Adjust reservation policies based on real-time data rather than fixed percentages. Implement a time-bound reservation review mechanism to phase out or modify the required policies.

8.3.4. Addressing Regional and Rural Disparities

Introduce special policies for regions with low literacy, high unemployment, and extreme poverty, in tribal areas and backward districts. Increase investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare in underdeveloped areas.

8.3.5. Promoting Social Integration and Reducing Reservation-Based Conflicts

Implement awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of inclusive

development over caste-based divisions. Encourage inter-community dialogue and collaboration to ensure that policies are perceived as fair and inclusive. Strengthen anti-discrimination laws in education and employment to ensure equal opportunities beyond reservation quotas.



Chapter 9

Conclusion

The reservation system in India has played a crucial role in addressing historical injustices and social inequalities, particularly for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). By ensuring greater access to education, employment, and political representation, reservation policies have contributed to the socio-economic upliftment of marginalized communities.

However, challenges such as concerns over meritocracy, the creamy layer issue, exclusion of economically disadvantaged upper castes, and political conflicts over reservation demands indicate the need for a balanced and inclusive approach. Judicial debates over the 50% cap on reservations further highlight the complexity of implementing these policies effectively.

To ensure long-term social equity, India must reform its affirmative action policies by incorporating socioeconomic criteria, expanding skill development programs, and strengthening anti-discrimination laws. Additionally, periodic reviews and data-driven policy adjustments are essential to maintain fairness and efficiency.

Ultimately, reservation should be one of many tools for social justice, complemented by education reforms, economic empowerment, and equal opportunities for all disadvantaged groups. A holistic and evolving approach will help India achieve its goal of an inclusive and equitable society.

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