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# **RESERVATION POLICIES AND SOCIAL EQUITY: RETHINKING IMPACT THROUGH INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

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## **Abstract**

Reservation policies, also known as affirmative action, play a crucial role in addressing historical and systemic inequalities in various countries. These policies aim to provide equal opportunities in education, employment, and political representation to marginalized communities, ensuring social justice and economic mobility. This paper examines the historical evolution of reservation policies across nations, including India, the U.S., South Africa, and Brazil, analysing their effectiveness in reducing socio-economic disparities. A comparative analysis of different models highlights successes, failures, and lessons learned from global strategies. The legal foundations, judicial challenges, and public perceptions surrounding reservation policies are also explored, demonstrating how media and political discourse shape public opinion. Additionally, the economic impact of reservation policies on labour markets, entrepreneurship, and economic growth is critically assessed. The paper further investigates the intersectionality of caste, class, gender, and ethnicity in affirmative action, emphasizing the need for inclusive and adaptive policies. Finally, future challenges and potential reforms are discussed, proposing a balanced approach that integrates meritocracy with social justice to create equitable and sustainable reservation frameworks.

**Keywords:** Reservation policies, affirmative action, social justice, economic impact, caste-based reservations.

## Introduction

Reservation policies, which are also known as affirmative action or quota systems, give groups that have been systematically disadvantaged a voice and equal chances in government. To fix systemic racism and past wrongs, these policies put an emphasis on education, jobs, and political participation<sup>1</sup>. Reservations are used to deal with tribal and caste identities in India. They are used to deal with racial and ethnic inequality in South Africa and the US. Reservation policies make sure that historically under-represented groups have the same access to resources and opportunities. This promotes social justice, equity, and inclusion. To fix social inequality, we need reservation policies. These laws level the playing field for groups that have been abused in the past. Saving areas for certain groups improves education, jobs, and political participation, making things more equal in both the social and economic senses. While they fill in some gaps in history, they also bring up questions about the long-term effects of affirmative action, reverse discrimination, and meritocracy. People who support reservations say they make things more equitable, but people who don't support them say they make people who don't benefit more reliant on others, inefficient, and hostile.

Being useful and coming up with new ideas are at the centre of the current policy on reservations discussion<sup>2</sup>. People are wondering if reservations should be based on need as well as race or ethnicity because of recent changes in society and the economy. Some groups don't have enough women, policies on affirmative action have changed because of globalisation, and business calls for reservations make things harder. We need to rethink how policies work now because of court decisions and changes to policies. This article talks about how reservation rules have changed over time, how social inequality has gone down, how these changes have affected the law and the economy, and how these changes compare to those in other countries. The way these policies are talked about in the news, how people feel about them, and how they are used in politics will also be looked at. As the world changes, this article takes a close look at the good and bad points of reservation policies to help with reforms and the future of affirmative action.

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<sup>1</sup> Jain S and Goel M, "The Volatile Journey of India's Reservation Policy Through Legal Amendments & Inconsistencies" 9 *Governance & Public Policy* 77-102 (2019).

<sup>2</sup>Khalil Ur Rehman, "Unravelling Equality and Social Justice in Contemporary Times" 5 *Indian JL & Legal Rsch.* 2334-2377 (2023).

## 1. Historical Evolution of Reservation Policies Across Countries

A lot of countries use quotas and affirmative action to fight prejudice and help people fit in with their communities. These rules make sure that groups that aren't well-represented can get jobs, education, and political power in a fair way<sup>3</sup>. The main goal is to get rid of systemic inequality, but the way things are done has changed because of politics and society. Legal quotas and affirmative action programs help groups that don't have many representatives in government. People always talk about and change these rules because they work and are generally agreed upon. There are a lot of well-organised reservations in India that are based on caste. In 1950, reservations were added to the Indian Constitution after being suggested by officials from the British colony. SC/STs have always been given more weight in public schools and government jobs. In 1990, the Mandal Commission said that Other Backward Classes should be included. This caused outrage across the country and legal challenges. With the start of EWS reservations in 2019, India's policy on affirmative action has changed.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the US used affirmative action to fight racism. These programs, which were based on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, tried to make the workplace and classroom more diverse. The cases of *Student for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023) and *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) both fought against using affirmative action to choose who gets into college. Affirmative action bans in states come from worries that they hurt the idea of meritocracy<sup>4</sup>. After apartheid ended in 1994, South Africa put in place reservation policies to fix the social and economic problems that were caused by separating people by race. Businesses and schools had to give Black South Africans, Coloured people, and Indians more attention as part of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programs. Some industries have seen increased representation from these policies, but others want changes due to elite capture and inefficiency. Brazil introduced affirmative action in the early 2000s to reduce racial and socioeconomic disparities. These programs targeted indigenous and Afro-Brazilians. The government set quotas for low-income students in public universities. Since these policies were implemented, historically under-represented groups' higher education enrolment has increased.

Political, legal, and economic factors have changed these nations' reservation policies. Social

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<sup>3</sup> G. Manoj, "Affirmative Actions in India and United States: A Challenge to Reservation Policy in India" 5 *Indian JL & Legal Rsch.* 1243-1253 (2023).

<sup>4</sup> Law R, Leung R, *et.al.*, "Distribution Channel in Hospitality and Tourism: Revisiting Disintermediation from the Perspectives of Hotels and Travel Agencies." 27 *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management.* 431-52 (2015).

justice has been advanced by affirmative action, but questions about its long-term efficacy and the need for other strategies dominate diversity and inclusion discussions worldwide.

## 2. Effectiveness of Reservation Policies in Addressing Social Inequalities

Reservation policies have provided education, jobs, and political representation to historically marginalised communities. These policies have narrowed economic and social gaps by removing institutionalised racism-related barriers to opportunity. Reservation quotas in public institutions, public sector employment, and education have greatly improved marginalised group representation. These policies have helped oppressed communities in Brazil, South Africa, and India rise above poverty and inequality<sup>5</sup>. Case studies show reservation policies' pros and cons. The Mandal Commission's 1990 recommendations attracted many OBC students to Indian universities and government jobs. Racial and socio-economic quotas increased Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous student representation in Brazil's public universities. Race diversity has increased at elite American universities like Harvard and UCLA thanks to affirmative action programs. Due to criticism that these policies only help the wealthiest marginalised groups, the poor and powerless continue to face significant challenges.

One of reservation policies' biggest benefits is closing educational and employment gaps. Marginalised communities often suffer long-term socio-economic disadvantages because quality education was historically only available to dominant social groups in many countries. Many low-income students now have bachelor's degrees and permanent jobs thanks to affirmative action. Consider South Africa<sup>6</sup>. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programs have increased Black South African job opportunities, narrowing the wage gap. Reservations have been criticised in some places for undermining meritocracy and calling for their elimination once everyone is equal. Reservation rules have changed things, but it's not clear how well they work. They have made it easier to move up in society, but they can't get rid of systemic inequality. Infrastructure problems, implementation problems, and policy gaps have sometimes made them less effective. Benefits from reservations are often worth less when unemployment and underemployment go up. We need changes to the economy, programs that

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<sup>5</sup> Cordes A, "Revisiting Stories and Voices of the Rogue River War (1853–1856): A Digital Constellatory Autoethnographic Mode of Indigenous Archaeology." 21 *Cultural Studies↔ Critical Methodologies* 56-69 (2021).

<sup>6</sup> Battiti R, Brunato M, *et.al.*, "Room Tetris in Room Committing: Why the Role of Minimum-Length-Of-Stay Requirements Should Be Revisited." 33 *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 4017-34 (2021).

help people learn new skills, and equal access to good schools in order for reservation policies to keep working.

### **3. Comparative Analysis of Reservation Systems and Outcomes**

They use policies like affirmative action and reservations to make up for wrongs done in the past and promote social justice. Everything about these rules—how they are made, how they are implemented, and what happens as a result—is based on the history, laws, and politics of each country<sup>7</sup>. We can see what works and what doesn't by comparing how reservations work in India, the US, Brazil, South Africa, and other places. This will help us figure out the best ways to do things and find ways to make changes.

#### **India: Caste-Based Reservation and Socio-Economic Inclusion**

The caste-based Indian reservation system is well-organised and widespread. Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Indian Constitution guarantee SC, ST, and OBC reservations. These restrictions affect education, employment, and politics. The system eventually included all Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). Despite the policy's significant improvements in education and employment for marginalised communities, elite capture, inadequate private sector representation, and social tensions persist. Meritocracy and economic reservations influence policy discussions.

#### **United States: Affirmative Action and Diversity Policies**

The US's affirmative action program is more equitable than India's quotas when it comes to women and people of colour. Laws like these were made during the Civil Rights Movement to make schools and the workplace more open to people of different backgrounds. Even though it has helped minorities get jobs, affirmative action has been called into question in court. In the cases of *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023) and *Regents of the University<sup>8</sup> of California v. Bakke* (1978), unfair practices based on race were called into question. This is why some states have made them illegal. Indian quotas are required by law, but U.S. policies are made by institutions and are not always the same across sectors because they are based on institutional discretion.

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<sup>7</sup> Begari J, Editor, "BR Ambedkar and Social Transformation: Revisiting the Philosophy and Reclaiming Social Justice." *Taylor & Francis* (2021).

<sup>8</sup> Baljith Singh (ed.), *I Revisiting Nehru in Contemporary India* (Routledge, Thames, Oxfordshire, England, UK, 1st edn., 2020).

### **Brazil: Racial and Socio-Economic Quotas**

Brazilian reservation policies prioritise Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian populations and address economic and racial inequality. Since the early 2000s, public universities have had quotas for these groups, greatly increasing their representation. Socioeconomic factors like income and public-school attendance affect eligibility<sup>9</sup>. These policies have helped underprivileged students, but critics say economic-based affirmative action is fairer and that racial identification is sometimes misused. The Brazil case study shows how economic and racial factors can make reservation policies more inclusive.

### **South Africa: Post-Apartheid Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)**

South Africa started Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programs after apartheid ended to close the gaps between black and white people in jobs, business ownership, and higher education. Not like India's caste-based reservations or the US's diversity-focused affirmative action, BEE policies help black South Africans, Coloureds, and Indians get jobs. BEE has been criticised for favouring a small elite class, nepotism, and corruption, even though it has increased the number of Black people working in skilled and corporate jobs. They might benefit more from a program that teaches new skills and gives poor people more power, no matter what race they are.

### **Successes and Failures of Various Models**

To give historically underserved groups more educational, job, and money-making opportunities, reservation policies must be carefully carried out and reviewed and changed on a regular basis. BEE has helped disadvantaged groups get into better schools in Brazil and India, and it has also led to more Black people owning businesses<sup>10</sup> in South Africa. But the long-term viability of these measures in all of these countries is called into question by things like the capture of elites, hostility from groups that don't want to help, and bad use of policies. The US affirmative action political and legal battles make it harder to ensure fairness while redressing past injustices.

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<sup>9</sup> Lall M and Rao SS, "Revisiting the Equality Debate in India and the UK: Caste, Race and Class Intersections in Education. In *Education and Social Justice in the Era of Globalisation*" 1 *Routledge India* 25-55 (2020).

<sup>10</sup> Cook W, "Articulating Water Conservation as Colonization: Revisiting the "public Interest" in Theodore Roosevelt's First Annual Message" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 1-23 (2024).

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- World events demonstrate that cookie-cutter strategies fail. Nations that consider socioeconomic status, historical prejudice, and social background perform better. Not just historically oppressed groups benefit from socioeconomic<sup>11</sup> factors and racial quotas in Brazil. Awareness campaigns, financial incentives, and skill development are necessary.
- Policies should be looked over and changed often. India has added EWS reservations to make them more open to everyone and take into account both caste and economic disadvantage. The US experience shows that diversity programs and hiring based on merit must work together to keep disagreements about affirmative action to a minimum.
- Lastly, stopping policy abuse needs openness and responsibility. People who say that South Africa's BEE program only helps a few people stress the need for more fair benefit distribution. To keep things fair, governments must always look at and keep an eye on reservation policies.
- Policies on reservations and affirmative action need to be flexible<sup>12</sup>, evaluated on a regular basis, and go hand in hand with changes in society and the economy in order to lower social inequality. International examples can help countries make their policies for empowering people with disadvantages better without sacrificing what's fair or efficient.

## 4. Legal Underpinnings and Judicial Challenges

In many countries, reservation policies are based on their constitutions and laws. These policies are meant to make up for past wrongs and promote social justice. Because of public debate and close judicial scrutiny, these policies often go through landmark court decisions that affect how they are put into place and how they change over time. There are constitutional requirements, court rulings, and ongoing challenges that test the balance between affirmative action, equal opportunity, and meritocracy.

### Constitutional Provisions and Legal Basis of Reservation Policies

Parts 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution form the basis for reservation rules. Article 15(4) says that the government can help SCs and STs and socially and educationally backward

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<sup>11</sup> Rozakou K, "Socialites of Solidarity: Revisiting the Gift Taboo in Times of Crises" 24 *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 185-99 (2016).

<sup>12</sup> Hitchmough S and Mays KT, "Rethinking the Red Power Movement" *Taylor & Francis* (2024).

classes. Article 16(4) says that disadvantaged groups will be able to get public jobs. Articles 330 and 332 make sure that everyone has a voice in politics by allocating seats in the federal and state legislatures<sup>13</sup>. The 77th Amendment established reservations in promotions, and the 103rd Amendment gave 10% of seats to EWS, among other amendments that expanded affirmative action. Anti-discrimination laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and national origin discrimination, support US affirmative action programs. There are many forms of affirmative action, but the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause has determined their constitutionality<sup>14</sup>. Affirmative action in South Africa is legalised by post-apartheid statutes like the Employment Equity Act and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Act, which aim to address decades of institutionalised discrimination. On the basis of the constitutional mandate to promote equality, the Brazilian Supreme Court has upheld affirmative action programs, including higher education racial quotas. Bumiputera, a Malay majority group in Malaysia, receive special education, employment, and business privileges under Article 153 of the Constitution.

### **Landmark Court Cases and Judicial Interpretations**

Judicial decisions have shaped reservation policies worldwide. Seminal Supreme Court decisions like *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992) upheld OBC reservations, but the total number was capped at 50% unless extraordinary circumstances existed. The court ruled that inadequate representation and backwardness cannot justify promotion reservations. In *Janhit Abhiyan v. Union of India* (2022), the Supreme Court<sup>15</sup> upheld the 103rd Constitutional Amendment, which established a 10% EWS reservation and maintained the 50% limit for SCs, STs, and OBCs. Race may be one of many factors in college admissions, but *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) found that racial quotas violated the Equal Protection Clause. The Supreme Court upheld affirmative action in university admissions in 2003's *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision, recognising diversity as a state interest. *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023) overturned college admissions racial affirmative action, signalling a major legal shift. *South Africa's Minister of Finance v. Van Heerden* (2004) confirmed affirmative action's constitutionality by demonstrating its legitimate purpose of

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<sup>13</sup> Endoh FT, "Democratic Constitutionalism in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Interim Constitution Revisited" *7 Africa Review* 67-79 (2015).

<sup>14</sup> Shoukla V, "Revisiting Reservation in Politics: Voices of Women Corporators" *Research Horizons* (2021).

<sup>15</sup> Mittelman, J. H. and Pasha, M. K, "Out from Under development Revisited: Changing Global Structures and the Remaking of the Third World." *Springer* (2016).

addressing past discrimination. In ADPF 186 (2012), the Brazilian Supreme Court upheld university racial quotas, stating that affirmative action is essential to substantive equality.

### **Legal Challenges and Public Controversies**

Reservation policies are legally supported, but courts and public debate often challenge them. Conflicts arise over affirmative action's compatibility with meritocracy. Reservation opponents say they make non-beneficiary groups resentful and underachieve in education and employment. Economic criteria in affirmative action programs in India have been debated due to concerns about the "creamy layer"—the relatively well-off OBCs who receive reservations. US conservatives say affirmative action discriminates against White and Asian American students, making it divisive<sup>16</sup>. After the Harvard case showed growing resistance to race-conscious policies, universities are exploring diversity strategies. Like in South Africa, BEE policies may have benefited the wealthy at the expense of the middle class and poor.

The public views reservation policies with scepticism due to their permanence. These policies were meant to lift disadvantaged communities temporarily, but persistent inequalities have extended them indefinitely. The Jats, Marathas, and Patidars have repeatedly protested for OBC status, showing how divisive reservation is in India. Brazil is debating replacing racial quotas with socioeconomic criteria. Judicial reviews of affirmative action programs often focus on balancing basic rights and affirmative action. Courts worldwide debate affirmative action duration. How should eligibility be determined? Should reservations be based on income rather than discrimination? These ethical and legal issues shape policy reforms and judicial interventions.

Reservation policies are shaped by public controversies and judicial interpretations despite their legal foundation in affirmative action. Affirmative action is necessary to right past wrongs, but courts have limited its use to prevent unfairness and favouritism. Legal battles over meritocracy, affirmative action duration, and economic criteria inclusion will shape global reservation policies.

### **Public Attitudes and Misconceptions**

People's views on reservation policies are often skewed by bad information, social biases, and

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<sup>16</sup> Park E and Kang J, "Understanding Customers' Hotel Revisiting Behaviour: A Sentiment Analysis of Online Feedback Reviews" 23 *Current Issues in Tourism* 605-11 (2020).

their own personal experiences. A lot of people think that reservation policies favour some people over others, but this is not true. Some people think it's bad that the way reservations work makes groups that have been privileged in the past feel left out. News stories that show how less qualified people got ahead at the expense of more qualified people who deserve it support this point of view. Another common misunderstanding is that reservations can't be changed, even if new laws and policy priorities come out<sup>17</sup>. People said that India's Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) quota watered down caste-based affirmative action, even though its goal was to reduce economic inequality. In the US, discussions about race-based affirmative action have led people to think that meritocracy is being undermined, while ignoring the struggles of racial minorities. Different groups of people have different views on reservations. Some groups see these rules as chances to move up in society, while others see them as things that get in the way. These arguments are made worse by political conversations and stories on social media.

### **Role of Political Discourse in Shaping Public Opinion**

Political rhetoric shapes reservation policy interpretation and implementation. Because affirmative action mobilises political parties and leaders for elections, reservations are often at the centre of campaign rhetoric and policy debates. Caste-based reservations are often the main issue in Indian elections, with parties advocating for economic changes or expansion. Recent reservations like the Marathas, Jats, and Patidars have muddied the waters politically and led to widespread protests and policy changes<sup>18</sup>. Conservatives have long opposed affirmative action, while progressives want to keep it. In *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023), the Supreme Court invalidated race-based college admissions affirmative action, sparking ideological division. South African and Brazilian politicians have called for the end of race-based affirmative action programs and the promotion of economic equality. Malaysian politicians are debating whether to include non-Malays in the Bumiputera policy. Reservation policies change due to media portrayal, public opinion, and political rhetoric. Media narratives can highlight or clarify misunderstandings, but political tactics usually determine policy changes. A fair and educated debate based on facts and history is needed to ensure reservation policies achieve social justice and equity.

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<sup>17</sup> Ahmad I and Firdous T, "Reservation Policies in J&K: Tracing the Genesis and Evolution" 12 *Social Sciences* 117-33 (2024).

<sup>18</sup> Udeshi S, ". Navigating the Legal and Policy Framework of Reservation in India: An Analytical Approach. the Completion of This Edited Volume" *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion* 139 (2024).

## 5. Economic Impact of Reservation Policies

Reservation policies greatly affect economic growth, entrepreneurship, and employment. These policies educate and employ historically disadvantaged groups to promote economic equality. Still debated are reservations' lasting effects<sup>19</sup>. Proponents say they've boosted the economy, while opponents say they've caused inefficiencies and unforeseen effects. Reservation policies' pros and cons for different industries are examined here. Reservation policies ensure historically under-represented groups have substantial representation in public and private sector employment, nonprofits, and education. Due to hiring quotas, under-represented groups work more. Indian SCs, STs, and OBCs have benefited economically from government work. The US federal workforce and academic faculty have also been diversified by affirmative action.

But reservation policies can cause labour market inefficiencies, say critics. They say quota-based hiring may cause skill mismatches because reservation candidates may be less qualified. If private companies without reservation policies prioritise merit-based hiring, public-private employment opportunities may be limited<sup>20</sup>. Reservation policies impact vital entrepreneurship. Several countries offer financial aid and incentives to under-represented groups starting businesses. Stand-Up India mentors and funds SC/ST entrepreneurs. South Africa's BEE policy favours Black-owned businesses for contracts and funding. These programs have helped low-income entrepreneurs start, increasing wealth redistribution and economic opportunities.

Due to a lack of social networks, financing, and market competition, reservation-supported businesses struggle to grow. To survive, these businesses need policymaker support, mentorship, and skill development after funding. Reservation policies unlock human capital, boosting the economy. Education, employment, and spending by formerly disadvantaged groups boosts the economy. Inclusive economic policies may work because workforce diversity can boost innovation and productivity<sup>21</sup>. Reserved groups lack economic mobility equality despite reservation policies opening many doors. Having some groups benefit while others struggle is a major issue. Despite government job and higher education reservations,

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<sup>19</sup> Ristic BD, "The Role of Public Policy Reservation in International Contracts" 52 *Zbornik Radova* 681 (2018).

<sup>20</sup> Pandey RK and Pandey M, "Entropic Analysis of Reservation Policy of Government of India" *In International Conference on Advances in IoT and Security with AI* 27-38 (2023).

<sup>21</sup> Wang W and Jin AL, "Friends or Foes: Revisiting Strategy-Proofness in Cloud Network Sharing" *IEEE 24th International Conference on Network Protocols (ICNP)* 1-10 (2016).

many SC/ST Indians work in low-paying manual labour. This "creamy layer" exclusion occurs when a small reserved elite monopolises affirmative action, trapping the poorest when few in these neighborhoods benefit.

Reservations' dependency stigma is a further problem. Workplace bias often links affirming action recipients' success to quotas rather than abilities. This reinforces reserved group stereotypes and hinders career advancement. Some Americans believe affirmative action recipients are hired and promoted based on race or ethnicity, not merit. Quality of education, skill development, and regional disparities affect reserved group economic mobility. Reservation policies could assist urbanites get better schools and jobs, but rural and poor people face structural barriers. We need better educational and training policies to close this achievement gap.

### **Case Studies of Economic Upliftment Through Reservation Policies**

Several case studies illustrate the positive economic impact of reservation policies in different countries.

- Reservation policies in India have made it easier for SC/ST students to get into universities, which helps people move up in society through education. The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies discovered that policies that make reservations have helped SC/ST families get stable government jobs and go to college<sup>22</sup>. Young people in these communities have also been motivated to study and work by the role models they see.
- Affirmative action has made it easier for more minorities to get jobs in high-paying fields like law, medicine, and academia in the U.S. Affirmative action policies make groups more diverse, which leads to better problem-solving and new ideas. Tech companies that encourage diversity do better financially and their employees are happier.
- South Africa's BEE policy was meant to fix the difference in income that apartheid caused. Preferences in hiring, funding<sup>23</sup>, and contracts have led to more black people owning their own businesses and hiring people from groups that have historically been

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<sup>22</sup> Jadhav S, "The Promise of Equality: A Comparison of India's Reservation Policy with Affirmative Action of the United States" 5 *Int'l JL Mgmt* 21 (2022).

<sup>23</sup> Cheerangote S, "Can Different Tribes Be Treated Alike? Revisiting the Reservation Policy for Scheduled Tribes" 18 *Language in India* 418-35 (2018).

under-represented. The policy has been hampered by corruption and waste, but it has helped more people get access to the economy.

## 6. Political Mobilization and Advocacy for Reservation Policies

Reservation policies were pushed for by politically active people from disadvantaged groups. Affirmative action has been sought by historically oppressed groups through protests, legal petitions, and political alliances. These efforts created policy frameworks and put in place measures to make reservations in politics, employment, and education. People from under-represented groups protest, lobby, and even sue for reservations. The structural and historical disadvantages of these groups have been brought to light by student unions, grassroots movements, and social justice organisations. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation support the Dalit-led reservation movement in India<sup>24</sup>. These groups emphasise affirmative action to ensure representation in government, schools, and the workforce. The American Civil Rights Movement promoted affirmative action policies by fighting workplace and classroom racial discrimination. Legal representation also mattered. Public interest lawsuits and petitions targeting discrimination have led to important court rulings that confirmed or expanded reservation policies. Courts have often extended affirmative action programs due to changing social and political dynamics.

### Political Responses and Legislative Measures

Political parties often use reservation policies for elections. In democracies like South Africa, Brazil, and India, marginalised communities support affirmative action parties. Due to new laws and constitutional amendments<sup>25</sup>, reservation policies have gradually expanded. The 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act of India established a 10% reservation for economically weaker sections (EWS) among upper castes, demonstrating the trend towards economic criteria in affirmative action. Afro-Brazilian groups helped pass the 2012 Racial Quota Law, which legalised racial reservations in Brazilian universities. Even though reservation policies are legal, political opposition is common. In particular, powerful socioeconomic groups view affirmative action as an attack on their privilege. Reservation policies have divided public opinion due to court challenges, street protests, and media debates.

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<sup>24</sup> Baral K, Sundara Vardhan T, *et.al.*, “Reservations for Backward Classes: Evolution, Criteria, and Commissions.” *Muslims in Telangana: A Discourse on Equity, Development, and Security*. 359-89 (2021).

<sup>25</sup> Batabyal AA and Biswas B, “Endogenizing the Reservation Value in Models of Land Development Over Time and Under Uncertainty Revisited” *In New Frontiers of Policy Evaluation in Regional Science* 37-44 (2022).

## Role of Activism and Grassroots Movements

Reservation policies have grown due to grassroots activism. Student, worker, and social reformer movements enabled affirmative action<sup>26</sup>. For instance, the Mandal Commission protests in India led to OBC reservations in public sector jobs and schools. The anti-apartheid movement also inspired South African Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies, which still shape economic inclusion efforts. To ensure reservation policies reach their intended beneficiaries, grassroots activism is crucial. Groups are targeting gaps, advocating for stronger enforcement, and opposing affirmative action policy weakening.

## 7. Intersectionality: Gender, Caste, Ethnicity, and Class

Reservation policies are based on caste, race, and ethnicity, but gender, socioeconomic status, and social class create multifaceted disadvantages. Since intersectionality recognises that marginalisation overlaps, affirmative action must be refined<sup>27</sup>. Women face double discrimination due to their gender and race, class, or ethnicity in oppressed communities. This has led many nations to implement gender-based affirmative action policies like reservations. Indian women from SC and ST communities are given Panchayati Raj seats. Employment equity laws require hiring preference for Black women in South Africa to address double discrimination. Education also uses gender-based affirmative action. Many Indian states offer SC/ST and OBC women scholarships and hostels for higher education. The university quota system prioritises Afro-Brazilian women due to their long-time marginalisation from academia.

### Case Studies of Gender-Based Affirmative Actions

1. The bill seeks to reserve 33% of seats in the Indian Parliament and state legislatures for women, with provisions for SC/ST women, acknowledging the intersection of caste and gender. While the bill remains under discussion, its potential impact is widely debated<sup>28</sup>.
2. Policies like BEE ensure that black women receive priority employment opportunities, but implementation challenges persist due to corporate resistance and tokenism.

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<sup>26</sup> Bhattacharjee S, "Ten Years of RTE Act: Revisiting Achievements and Examining Gaps" *ORF Issue Brief* 304 (2019).

<sup>27</sup> Sarki SS, "The Impact of Reservation Policy on Scheduled Castes of Darjeeling Hills" *A Sociological Study (Doctoral Dissertation)*.

<sup>28</sup> Lall M and Rao SS, "Revisiting the Equality Debate in India and the UK: Caste, Race and Class Intersections in Education. in *Education and Social Justice in the Era of Globalisation*" *Routledge India* 25-55 (2020).

3. Brazil's racial quotas have improved university access for black women, but economic barriers still pose challenges, highlighting the need for additional financial aid measures.

### **The Impact of Economic and Social Class on Reservations**

Who benefits from reservation policies depends on their income. Inequalities exist within historically disadvantaged groups, even though affirmative action focusses on them. However, improving one's economic situation does not eliminate race or caste prejudice. Research shows that even financially secure SC/ST Indians face workplace biases. Black professionals in the US report prejudice despite affirmative action programs in the workplace and classroom. Socioeconomic status also affects getting a good job, learning new skills, and getting a good education<sup>29</sup>. People in rural areas who are poor or on the outside have a harder time getting reserved seats than people who live in cities. To solve this problem, we need reservation policies, financial help, job training, and better public schools. Because of race, class, gender, and caste, reservation policies have to deal with new problems and chances. Affirmative action has helped level the playing field, but it needs to change to meet the new needs of oppressed groups. Reservation policies can do more than just represent people by taking into account different points of view. They can also help bring about social and economic change.

### **8. Future of Reservation Policies: Challenges and Opportunities**

When it comes to reserves and affirmative action, rules are changing all over the world. Lots of places are changing how they handle these issues to make their economies and societies better. In the U.S., policies that used to be based on race have been replaced with ones that are based on socioeconomic status. France is one country in Europe that has plans to help students from low-income families get into college. There is more talk about reservations in India. One idea is to give 10% of the seats to people from the upper castes who are economically weaker (EWS). It is hard for Brazil to follow through with its plans to increase the number of spots it gives to people of certain races. To make reservation policies more fair, changes could be made that focus on educational and skill-building uses, going back to the "creamy layer" limitations, and regular checks and audits<sup>30</sup>. Along with caste or ethnicity, these changes should take into

<sup>29</sup> Balabantaray SR and Singh A, "A. Review of (Revisiting) the Transgender Education in India: An Analysis of the National Educational Policy 2020" 22 *Journal of Public Affairs* 2504 (2022).

<sup>30</sup> Ansari KA, "Revisiting the Minority Imagination: An Inquiry into the Anticaste Pasmada-Muslim Discourse in India." 11 *Critical Philosophy of Race* 120-47 (2023).

account how much money people have. It's very important to find a good balance between being fair and being responsible. New reservation rules should help people get an education, acquire new skills, and get hired, which will bring these two ideas together.

## **9. Successful Global Strategies for More Equitable Reservation Policies**

Several countries have come up with strategies that other countries can use to make their reservation policies more equitable. These strategies teach us a lot about how to find a good balance between fairness, effectiveness, and including everyone.

### **1. South Africa's Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE)**

Because Black South Africans have historically been disadvantaged, the B-BBEE policy has been very important in making sure that they can work in the economy. There are more parts to the policy than just job and school limits. It's also about who can own businesses and get to economic resources. Business Black Belts (BBEE) has done a great job of reducing racial and economic inequality by using both affirmative action and economic empowerment<sup>31</sup>.

### **2. Brazil's Racial Quotas in Higher Education**

Brazil set racial quotas in its public universities in 2012. This shows how affirmative action can be used to take into account both race and socioeconomic status. This method has helped a lot more Afro-Brazilian students get into college, which is good for racial equality and moving up in society<sup>32</sup>. It's a big step forward to fix systemic inequality, but there are still issues with quality and implementation.

### **3. Canada's Affirmative Action for Indigenous Communities**

As part of Canada's affirmative action policy, extra steps have been taken to help Indigenous people get better jobs, schools, and in politics. A lot of progress has been made in Indigenous rights thanks to these policies, which have given them a voice in both the public and private sectors. Affirmative action programs in Canada that take Indigenous rights into account show how to meet the needs of different groups in society.

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<sup>31</sup> Fengmin Z, Baijun W, *et.al.*, "Investigating Revisit Intention of Medical Tourists in China Through Nutritional Knowledge, Perceived Medical Quality, and Trust in the Physiologist: A Recommendation on Health Tourism Policy Measures." 10 *Frontiers in Public Health* (2022).

<sup>32</sup> Das S, "Revisiting the Quota Conundrum. Caste, Gender and Media: Significant Sociological Trends in India." 462.

### **Recommendations for Improving Reservation Policies in Contemporary Society**

- A detailed plan improves reservation policies. First, governments must use data to create policies that meet the needs of marginalised groups regardless of gender, race, class, or caste.
- To prioritise under-represented groups, governments can make reservations easier to obtain and prioritise job<sup>33</sup> and school training. To improve affirmative action, governments should fund programs that teach reservation residents job skills.
- Finally, merit and social justice must be discussed publicly. Talking about under-represented groups in education and the workforce can change minds and lead to lasting policies.

### **Conclusion**

Reservation rules are crucial to fighting inequality. Despite making things fairer and more open to more people, these policies are still controversial and cause many problems in our globalised society. This article examined affirmative action's history, effectiveness, and legal frameworks using case studies from India, the US, South Africa, and Brazil. It shows that affirmative action must change to address race, class, gender, and ethnicity exclusion. Reservation rules must be more complex, adaptable, and multifaceted to meet modern needs. Social justice and meritocracy must be balanced, economic inequality reduced, and education expanded for affirmative action programs to succeed. Reservation policies close equality and opportunity gaps to make the future fairer and more inclusive. Future suggestions ought to concentrate on socioeconomic factors, improve data analysis, and keep the public talking to keep these policies relevant in a changing world.

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<sup>33</sup> Cordes A, "Revisiting Stories and Voices of the Rogue River War (1853–1856): A Digital Constellatory Autoethnographic Mode of Indigenous Archaeology" 21 *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 56-69 (2021).