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Castes as Weaker Sections in Contemporary Indian Society: A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT

Abstract- This Article talks about the criteria by which certain classes/groups are included in various caste categories in the Indian constitution. Basically, Indian society is a caste-ridden society. Its entire population is hierarchically arranged and divided into different sections. After independence, adopting principles based on liberty, equality and fraternity of the Indian constitution, politicians, policymakers, and other intellectuals began to think for the castes, which were low in hierarchical order in the Indian social structure. Technically, different resolutions of the Indian government have divided the weaker sections, such as EWS, OBCs, SCs and STs, on the basis of social, educational and economic backwardness. As mentioned in Article 16 and its clauses of the Indian constitution, India is committed to the welfare and development of its people in general and of vulnerable sections of society in particular. Equality of status and opportunity for all citizens of the country are guaranteed by the Constitution of India. Hence, in this article, the author has tried to locate different socially, educationally and economically weaker sections/classes into different caste categories like EWS, OBCs, SCs and STs.

Keywords: Caste, Class, Category, Weaker Sections, Indian Constitution, Welfare, Resolutions, Reservation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian society is a caste-ridden society. Its entire population is hierarchically arranged and divided into different sections, which is called caste. There is no unanimous definition of caste; instead, scholars in the field of sociology studies castes and have given different opinions and defined caste in different ways. According to Herbert Risley, "Caste is a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same heredity callings and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community." Bougle (1958) has postulated three elements of caste, namely, hereditary specialisation, hierarchy and repulsion or

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opposition. Besides referring to hereditary membership, caste councils, hierarchy, and endogamy as important features of the caste system, he also refers to the restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and civil and religious disabilities. G.S. Ghurye (1932) has described the caste system based on its six features which are a segmental division of society, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and restrictions on marriage.

The term weaker sections/classes or castes refers to the sections of society that are socially, economically and politically lagging behind the other sections of the society's population and have been experiencing various forms of inequalities due to their backwardness. The Government of India Act 1935 defines weaker sections as caste/class or classes of people suffering from educational and economic backwardness, as well as some aspects of social life.

After the independence of India in 1947, there were some major initiatives in favour of the STs and SCs and after the 1980s, in favour of OBCs (Other Backward Castes/Classes) and in 2019 for weaker in the General Category also. Reservation is primarily given to all Four (4) groups: Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Economically Weaker Section, abbreviated as SCs, STs, OBCs, and EWS, respectively.

Significance of the study:

Based on the literature review, Indian society remained highly inegalitarian and rigidly stratified along caste, class and gender lines for centuries. Though gradual changes had happened, the society remained largely so at the time of India's Independence from British colonial rule. With the adoption of the Indian Constitution, the country embarked on the path of transformation along egalitarian, democratic lines to ensure justice for the marginalised sections of society. So, India introduced the policy of reservation for the upliftment of the marginalised sections, viz., the SCs and STs, in political representation, jobs and education, as provided under the Indian Constitution. The reservation for these sections was given in government jobs and admission in educational institutions by the Central and state governments. State governments also provided reservations for the OBCs in jobs and education. Later, in 1992 the Central government introduced reservations for OBCs in government jobs and admission to educational institutions. In 2019 central government and some state governments introduced reservations for General Caste/Category also. So, there is a need to understand the basic criteria by which the policy of reservation is expanded to emerging weaker sections of society.

Objectives:

- To know the nature of weaker sections of the society (special reference to EWS, OBCs, SCs, STs);
- To examine the criteria for availing reservation policy benefits (social, economic and political); and
- To understand the constitutional aspects by which the policy of reservation is expanded.

Methodology:

A descriptive and Diagnostic research design is followed in the present study. In the present study, sources of both primary and secondary data collection include relevant books, research articles in journals, newspaper reports, government documents, etc.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS IN FAVOUR OF DIFFERENT CASTE/CATEGORIES

Social stratification is based on caste in society, where most of the population faces socio-cultural inequality. Social and educational inequalities can be found in Indian society. Different safeguards have been provided in the Constitution of India for the upliftment and protection of the weaker sections of society. Table: 1 reflects that a 10% EWS reservation quota is given only for the General Caste/Category. Other Castes/Categories already have reservations like OBC (27%), SC (15%), and ST (7.5%).

Table 1: Caste and Category-wise estimated Population and Reservation quota

S. No.	Caste/ Category	Estimated population	Reservation quota in Percentage
1.	General (EWS)	22.8%	10%
2.	OBCs	52%	27%
2.	SCs	16.6%	15%
4.	STs	8.6%	7.5%
Total		100%	59.5%

(Source: Census of India, 2011.)

Criteria of EWS Caste/Category

General Caste/Category mostly fall under high castes that originally were not availing

reservations. In 2019, under the General Caste/Category government thought to provide reservations to economically weaker sections within the General caste/category. EWS are economically backward classes in India. In 2019, the 103rd Amendment Act provided 10% reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections of society. There are the following criteria which permit a family to take benefits of EWS reservation. These are as follows:

- You should be a 'general' candidate (not covered under reservation for SC, ST or OBC).
- Your family's gross annual income should be below Rs. 8 lakhs. This includes income from all sources, such as agriculture, salary, business, etc., for the financial year before you apply for the exam.
- Your family should not own agricultural land of size 5 acres or more.
- Your family should not own a flat residential area of 1000 square feet or more.
- Your family should not own a residential plot (in notified municipalities) of the area of 100 square yards or more.
- Your family should not own a residential plot (other than in notified municipalities) of an area of 200 square yards or more.

Criteria of OBC Caste/Category

OBCs were not originally in the reservation scheme, but during the 1990s, the Mandal Commission studied all the communities in India to find what castes were backwards compared to the general population. Based on 1931 census data, they estimated that that 52% of India's population belonged to backwards castes due to various socio-economic factors like wealth or traditional occupation. The possibility for providing reservations to these people was allowed in Article 15(4) and Article 16(4), which states that the government can provide reservations to backward classes. Other Backward Classes (OBC) are socially and educationally backward classes in India. Only if you belong to **Non-Creamy Layer OBC** you will get the reservation 27% in jobs as well as in educational institutions. If you fall under the **Creamy Layer of OBC**, you will not get the benefit of an OBC reservation. Considering the parent's income, it divides into Creamy and Non-Creamy layers. If the income is above 8 lakh, the person will come under the Creamy Layer. If the income is below 8 lakhs, the person will come under the Non-Creamy Layer. As a result, that family will get an OBC Non-Creamy layer award, granting them access to all government jobs and positions and age exemptions for competitive examinations.

Criteria of SCs Caste/Category

SCs communities were previously seen as at the bottom of the caste system in Indian society. Because these castes had hereditary professions such as agricultural labourers, manual scavenging, tannery, washing clothes, daily wage workers, fishing and more, they were subjected to the practice of untouchability, which takes the form of various social restrictions ranging from inability to touch other castes to inability to use the same water source or even live in the same area. So, the Scheduled Castes (SCs) were socially and educationally backward in India. Now, they are given a reservation 15% in jobs as well as in educational institutions. SC's family will get an award, granting them access to admission in educational institutions, all government jobs and positions, as well as age exemptions for competitive examinations.

Criteria of STs Caste/Category

The definition of this group varies, but the criteria for a Scheduled Tribe are primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. Most of these groups are considered Adivasis and the original inhabitants, while others are nomadic tribes. The policy of granting reservation to the STs in education and government jobs in India is 7.5%. The possibility for providing reservations to these people was allowed in Article 15(4) and Article 16(4), which states that the government provides reservations to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

III. CONCLUSION

For Weaker sections of society or socially and educationally backward castes/classes, reservation is a system of affirmative action that provides representation in education, employment, government schemes, and politics. Based on provisions in the Indian Constitution, it allows the Union Government, the States and Territories of India to set reserved quotas or seats, which lower the qualifications needed in jobs, exams, university admissions, scholarships, loan approval, etc. The policy of granting reservation to the SCs, STs and OBCs in education and government jobs in India is 15%, 7.5% and 27%, respectively. The Parliament amended the Constitution of India as in the 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 2019 to provide 10% reservation in education and government jobs in India for the Economically Weaker Section under the General Caste/Category.

Suggestions

It is the constitutional duty of the central or state government to implement quotas and protect the weaker sections of the society, but first of all, there should be caste-based census to enumerate specific caste's actual percentage, i.e. their numerical preponderance so that according to their population reservation quota (in percentage) can be granted for holistic

development. Government must be careful while implementing the provisions related to the monetary upliftment of the weaker population; otherwise, unworthy people misuses it.

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