

THE IMPACT OF CASTE-BASED RESERVATION POLICIES ON SOCIAL EQUITY IN INDIA

Mr. Vivek Sharma

Research Scholar

(Ph.D In Law)

Desh Bhagat University

Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab

Dr. Arti

Assistant Professor

Department of Law

Desh Bhagat University

Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab

ABSTRACT

A complex topic rooted in historical and sociopolitical contexts is how caste-based reservation regulations affect social fairness in India. Particularly in India, reservations for the social and educationally disadvantaged classes (SEBC) have experienced long-standing problems in recent years. The increasing politicization and its consequences, such as the retraction of reservations for SC and ST advancements and arrangements, the irregular dissolution of associations for socially disadvantaged students, the lack of accurate information about accumulation opportunities, the vacancy of positions in business, and, finally, the persistent underrepresentation in the 49.5–50 percent range—of which 15% are reserved for SCs, 7.5 percent for STs, and 27 percent for OBCs—expose the institutional breakdown in the commitment to social equity. In this particular case, reservation necessitates a re-evaluation of how and why it not only creates division and conflict within the minority groups it targets, but also gradually presents itself to the majority as an exclusive and exclusive group. The motivation behind the article is to extend the two-way relationship within which hold aims to articulate the voice of the unaddressed. Simultaneously, the paper analyzes a gradual change in the significant influence of reservation, which is increasingly viewed as a threat to the interests of the majoritarian class and caste.

Keywords: *Caste-Based, Reservation, Policies, Social Equity, India, Social and Educational Backward Classes (SEBC), Historical, Socio-Political*

1. INTRODUCTION

India has always struggled with challenges of inequality and segregation rooted in the caste system due to its astounding socio-social terrain. The government's caste-based reservation laws, implemented in relation to minorities in society, aim to rectify these historical betrayals by providing marginalized networks with better opportunities for education, employment, and political representation. Post-freedom, this system is a deliberate attempt to promote social justice and fairness. Whatever the case, these reservation policies have

a variety of effects and have sparked a lively debate about their suitability and recommendations for social justice.

The Indian Constitution of 1950, which envisioned a framework to uplift Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), who had endured hundreds of years of segregation, is credited with sparking the emergence of caste-based quota laws. After some time, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have also been included in the scope of reservations. This evolution is consistent with the distinct notion of social imbalances in India, where caste—while still a central element—converges with other factors such as regional differences and socioeconomic position.

The primary objective of these programs is to enhance the representation of marginalized groups in various spheres of public life, such as employment and education. The policies aim to provide opportunities for SCs, STs, and OBCs that they would not have otherwise been able to due to systemic prejudices and lack of access by granting them a portion of seats in government posts and educational institutions. This has led to significant advancements in these networks' socioeconomic standing, fostering increased political engagement and adaptability.

However, the sustainability of these programs in achieving true social justice depends on ongoing evaluation. Reservations, according to critics, may provide immediate benefits to members of marginalized groups, but they are not a guarantee that the fundamental problems of caste-based division will be solved. There is also concern that, rather than eradicating caste differences and personalities, the reservation system would instead reinforce them. Furthermore, there is debate over whether socioeconomic factors should also be taken into account when determining eligibility, or if reservation schemes should only be based on caste.

Furthermore, conflicts between various networks have been exacerbated by the reservation procedures. The perception of unfair advantages for some groups can stoke animosity and social discord, complicating the quest for harmonious society. There are also arguments over the possibility of meritocracy being undermined, since it is occasionally perceived that filling saved posts will come at the expense of decisions made on the basis of legitimacy.

Although caste-based quota rules in India have undoubtedly strengthened marginalized networks and promoted more visible social consideration, their impact on social fairness in general remains perplexing and contentious. The real test will come from adjusting these policies to better serve the larger goal of creating a more equitable and cohesive society while also addressing the concerns of minorities in society. To ensure that policies evolve in a way that truly addresses the unique and dynamic nature of social disparities in India, this calls for ongoing assessment and interaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Diwan and Lal (2020) provide a comparative evaluation of social justice programs in higher education, focusing on American government policy toward minorities and the Indian reservation system. Their research reveals that although the two systems aim to correct historical wrongs and enhance equity, they operate under different socio-political frameworks. The authors emphasize that while the Indian reservation system has led to more opportunities for historically undervalued networks, government policy regarding minorities in American society has faced significant legal and political challenges. Despite their successes, the two systems continue to have problems with credibility, sustainability, and backfire, which is indicative of ongoing conversations about balancing quality and equity.

Goghari and Kusi (2023) provide a brief overview of the Indian caste system while examining its key elements and psychological repercussions. The piece deftly illustrates the caste system's multiple tiers, emphasizing the importance of varnas and the underappreciated Dalits. The authors discuss how the system endures despite negative effects on people's mental health and social standing. Through a combination of historical and modern analysis, the review presents the hardworking notion of caste-based inequality and emphasizes the need for further efforts to resolve these issues.

Haq et al. (2020) examine how diversity is multilayered in India, paying particular attention to caste, disability, and orientation-related issues. They examine the challenges of attaining complete inclusion as well as the complexities of responding to these convergent forms of discrimination. The authors argue that although there have been significant advancements in strategy and law, real communication calls for a coordinated approach that takes into account the various needs of marginalized groups. This study supports ongoing efforts to create inclusive environments in a variety of fields.

Imam (2023) provides a historical overview of the development of India's reservation system, including its inception, advancements, and present state. The essay discusses significant turning points in the strategy's history while keeping in mind authoritative shifts and their impact on social and economic outcomes. Imam highlights the system's role in addressing historical injustices and promoting social equity while also acknowledging the current debates and responses around its implementation. This summary provides important background information for comprehending the historical trajectory of the reservation system and its implications for modern social justice.

Jadhav (2022) compares and contrasts the US government's approach regarding minorities in society with India's reservation scheme, emphasizing how effective each is at promoting uniformity. The essay examines

the goals, historical backgrounds, and outcomes of the two policies, highlighting the similarities and differences between them. According to Jadhav, the two systems operate inside distinct socio-political frameworks that influence their implementation and impact, even though they aim to rectify historical injustices and improve representation. The comparison draws attention to the challenges and opportunities associated with each strategy for achieving social justice.

Kumar (2022) discusses popular myths and misunderstandings regarding India's caste-based reservation system. A few myths are debunked in the piece, such as the idea that reservation laws undermine or maintain caste distinctions. According to Kumar, these myths typically undermine the persuasive application of reservation regulations and fuel ongoing debates regarding their legitimacy and impact. The review aims to promote a more informed and productive conversation on the role of caste-based reservations in furthering social justice by elucidating these fantasies.

3. DIALECTIC OF RESERVATION

Regarding reservations, the master and anti-reservation discourses contradict and convince one another, smearing the save holders' class while purposefully seeking to identify probable consequences of inclusion. Is reservation a safeguard against the visible harmful effects of partisan caste legislation on lower caste organizations, or does it ensure representation for the underrepresented, lower caste? Tell me how the state fulfils the role of the hold. Additionally, what measures are taken to appropriate, guarantee, and implement reservations in order to incite anti-reservation sentiments among lower caste reservation recipients? Lastly, considering the long-standing demands of the upper castes to impose a smooth layer on the wealthy SC and STs and to remove them from the reservation, how can a comparable study of just emerging lower caste groups serve as a yardstick for judgment? Given that the SC and ST improvement index is much below the average, how can the claim that wealthy SC and ST recipients—whether they be first- or second-generation recipients—be appropriately classified as wealthy? And lastly, considering the majoritarian interests on the reservation, how one may possibly foresee and thwart such attacks on the reservation rules.

Revisions to reservations, adequate representation of lower caste and minority gatherings, the seventy-year progress report, the state's disproportionate distribution of social assets for the socially and educationally backward classes, and the diligent infiltration and dilution of reservation policies all work together to disprove the argument that the rationale for reservations is based on. Since the reservation still acknowledges the constitutional rights of oppressed groups to education, appointments, and political development, the analysis concludes that it is still relevant. Recognizing the historical context that molded the constitutional right to a reserved seat for members of lower castes, it contends that reservation is neither a necessary condition for ethics nor a socially advantageous state role. Ambekar outlined the founding vision for

reservation in the Constitution, which was supported by three points: ending the system of caste monopolization and various levels of caste construction; battling exploitation; acknowledging the liberties of lower castes; and, lastly, introducing equality and equity in human relationships.

On a spectrum of unbridled possible outcomes, this reasoning of nonacceptance and acknowledgment has been viewed with skepticism. It has been studied, vilified, isolated, embraced, and taken advantage of by the well-off. Because the reservation perspective is heuristic, people who benefit from it and those who don't have to move as often. The reservation's recent history, which dates back many years to its establishment, has withstood numerous laws, modifications, and criticisms from the majority brahminical caste, which is the preferred caste. In this sense, reservations are not created without research conducted by members of both the upper and lower castes, which has made it easier for the upper caste. Brahmins will collaborate in choosing the narrative surrounding caste reservations. This contradictory nature of quota—which is simultaneously fought and experienced, misused and clarified—is attested to by the recent Jat and Gurjar agitation in North India, which makes reservation an alluring subject for social engineering research.

4. RECENT JUDICIAL VERDICT ON RESERVATION

In a recent decision, the High Court outlawed advanced reservations for SC and ST in the case of Mukesh Kumar and Anr. versus The Province of Uttarakhand and Ors., which was decided on February 7, 2020. The justices L. Nageswara Rao and Gupta announced their decision brought attention to "No mandamus can be given by the Court directing the state government to give reservations" , "no essential right inheres in an individual to guarantee reservation in promotions" , "it is settled regulation the state can't be coordinated to give reservations to appointment in broad daylight posts," in addition to "the state will without a doubt reserve spot for SCs/STs in issues of promotions."

Vinod Kumar and three other members of the scheduled castes filed a writ suit against the government of Uttarakhand, claiming that it had ignored the reservation standard when promoting people to the post of Right Hand Engineer (Common) in the Division of Broad daylight Works, Uttarakhand Administration. The court has now released its decision in this matter. We took note of the petition in 2011. As stated in the M. Nagaraja case and the preceding ruling in Jarnail Singh, the High Court concluded that "it isn't expected for the state government to gather quantifiable information regarding the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in State benefits or regarding their backwardness preceding providing reservation on the side of themselves in promotion".

The Uttarakhand High Court later reversed and reverted the ruling in 2019. The validity of the claim was put to the test when the High Court declared in February 2020 that "reservations for appointments or promotions to public posts are not guaranteed by legislation." This has created uncertainty about whether the lower caste

networks' constitutional right to reservations will end. Dr. K. S. Chauhan, a specialist lawyer who attended on behalf of the class representatives, along with Mr. Kapil Sibal, Mr. Dushyant Dave, and Mr. Colin Gol, gave learned senior insight and stated, "The state cannot decline to gather quantifiable information regarding the ampleness or inadequacy of representation of the Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes straightforwardly benefits." They argued that, in accordance with Article 16, Provision (4-A) of the Indian Constitution, the State is expected to make reservations for promotions in request to advance individuals from the Scheduled castes and tribes. The State Government cannot prevent individuals from getting scheduled castes and tribes their right to justice by failing to carry out its constitutionally mandated implementation of Articles 15 (4) and 16 (4-A)."

Table 1: A synopsis of Articles 15, 16, and 29 on Equality and Non-Discrimination in the Constitution

Article	Clause	Content
15	(1)	No citizen may be unjustly treated by the state because of their gender, race, religion, caste, or place of birth, or any combination of these.
	(2)	Discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or any combination of these shall not subject any citizen to any liability, limitation, condition, or disability with respect to any of the following:(a) the retail, dining, accommodation, and entertainment options available to the public; and (b) the accessibility of public spaces, including roadways, bathing ghats, tanks, wells, and sites maintained in whole or in part by State money or designated for public use.
	(3)	The State may nonetheless take targeted actions to improve the lives of women and children notwithstanding this provision.
	(4)	A citizen from a socially or educationally disadvantaged group, as well as a member of a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, may seek special assistance from the state in accordance with the provisions of this article or clause (2) of Article 29.
16	(1)	Equal employment opportunity and appointment to any State position shall be accorded to all people.
	(2)	Religious, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, national origin, or any combination thereof should not be grounds for denial or discrimination in relation to any position or office held by a person in the State.
	(4)	This provision does not pre-empt the state's ability to institute a program that prioritizes the appointment or retention of members of any historically underrepresented group in state government.

29 (2)	Under the guise of "Cultural and Educational Rights," it is forbidden to discriminate against any individual on the basis of their race, religion, caste, language, or any combination of these factors in order to prevent them from receiving state-funded educational opportunities or services.'
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Due to the fact that "there is inadequate representation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the government services in the state of Uttarakhand," the committee comprised of learned counsels for reserved employees concluded that the Uttarakhand government's claim was made up and misleading. The learned counsel said that based on the information gathered by the committee, the state government had an obligation to give reservations.

The decision, then, clearly deviates from established precedent and the rule of law, which ought to have upheld the lower caste reservation jurisdiction as a constitutional obligation outlined in the fundamental framework of the constitution. Not only are Articles 15(4), 16(4), and 16(4-A) enabling provisions, but they also uphold the fundamental rights to equality that are protected by Part III of the Constitution. By giving the State the freedom to choose whether or not to reserve seats for members of underrepresented groups in appointments and promotions, social justice has been left to the states' discretion. The reservation provision has been abused and manipulated further by the arbitrary discretion that denied reservations for SC and ST appointments and promotions and by permitting de-reservation in the Mukesh Singh case ruling. "Every effort should be made to recruit a candidate of the reserved category and de-reservation in such vacancies proposed/made only when such a course is inescapable," according to Point 8.1 about reservations in non-technical and quasi-technical posts. Refusing to promote personnel in the reserved category and basing appointment decisions only on general criteria amounts to institutionalizing violence directed by savarnas against those who have traditionally been harmed. Reservation is not inviolable, but the backward classes have suggested that there is an imperative requirement to make it a non-negotiable and unbreakable provision under Article 21.

The decision is noteworthy because it illustrates how constitutional morality and equity are being undermined in order to gain reservation for historically underprivileged caste groups under Articles 14–18, 29, 46, 341–342, and 335. The prohibition against discrimination against Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and Other Backward Classes has been significantly weakened by it. It would be discriminatory for the State to prevent personnel from the backward caste (SC) from being promoted to the reserved category.

5. CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE

❖ Social Equity

In a society, social equity refers to the equitable allocation of resources, opportunities, and respect. It is predicated on the idea that regardless of one's circumstances, disposition, or social background, everyone should approach similarly open doors. This idea acknowledges the disparities that exist in society due to a variety of circumstances, such as caste, socioeconomic class, race, or sexual orientation, and it proposes ways to address these distinctions in order to provide a more inclusive atmosphere. In order to level the playing field and enable those who are disadvantaged or marginalized to fully participate in society, equity revolves around the necessity of providing them with additional resources or assistance.

❖ Social Justice

In addition to social equity, the concepts of fairness, equality, and human rights are also included in the larger and more complete idea of social justice. It aims to establish a society in which people are respected, treated with dignity, and have their rights respected. Addressing structural barriers and systemic injustices that support discrimination and inequality is a necessary part of social justice. It highlights the necessity of societal shifts that both alter the fundamental causes of inequality and provide fair access to opportunities. This entails promoting economic and social rights, arguing for legislative and policy changes, and cultivating an inclusive and respectful society.

❖ The Relationship Between Equity and Justice

Despite their similarities, social justice and social equity are two different ideas. Equity is commonly perceived as a pragmatic strategy for attaining justice through the resolution of explicit inequalities and needs within a community. Conversely, justice is a more general concept that includes the ideal condition of equality and fairness. While social equity is primarily concerned with offering targeted assistance to reduce inequities, achieving social justice necessitates addressing both the consequences and the underlying causes of inequality. When combined, these ideas seek to build a society that is more equitable and inclusive and gives everyone the invaluable opportunity to prosper.

❖ Application to Caste-Based Reservation Policies

Understanding these principles is essential to comprehending the purpose and effects of caste-based quota laws. Reservation policies aim to promote social fairness by offering support and opportunities to historically neglected and disadvantaged caste groups. This strategy aims to right historical wrongs and level the playing field in the business, education, and other sectors. Despite this, there is constant discussion over the effectiveness and equity of these programs since they touch on more general social justice concerns such as the need for structural change and the difficulty of resolving entrenched social and economic disparities.

All things considered, knowing the ideas of social justice and equity helps assess and improve the policies meant to rectify caste-based inequalities and advance a more just society.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by giving traditionally excluded networks access to political representation, business opportunities, and education, caste-based reservation regulations in India have significantly contributed to the advancement of social fairness. Greater social inclusion and strengthening have resulted from these programs' facilitation of upward mobility and reduction of inequities. However, their influence is complex; although they alleviate current injustices, they also present difficulties including the risk of entrenching caste stereotypes and possible discrimination in the opposite direction. The effectiveness of reservations in promoting true social fairness depends on how well these policies are continuously evaluated and adjusted to reflect shifting socioeconomic conditions. In order to attain full social justice, it is imperative to complement reservations with more extensive changes that tackle systemic problems and promote a society that is more inclusive and equal.

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