

Strategies for Combating Caste Inequity: A Critical Analysis of Reservation Laws and their Socio-Economic Impact

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Abstract

Most empirical studies related to the caste-based reservation in India analyze the legal provisions of this system, its consequential social impact and, to a certain degree, its efficiency enhancing social mobility as a goal of affirmative action. Using data collected from a survey that is designed with constructs anchored on the system, this study assesses the participants' level of awareness about the system, their attitude towards its influence and recommendation for improvement. The study reveals that there is general acceptance of the system though calls for changes have been announced with reference to increase in reservation to economically weaker sections and improved educational facilities. The work is valuable for furthering an ongoing conversation on the process of attaining social justice.

Keywords: Reservation system, socio-economic effects, change, weaker sections.

INTRODUCTION

Caste discrimination has remained as a dominant factor of discrimination in the societies of India and it has had a strong nexus with the society's developmental agenda. However, caste prejudice perpetuates inapposite to the capacities of an efficient democratic state based on reservation laws an affirmative action policy [1]. Reservation laws, which were intended to ensure Indian social justice and give the disadvantaged populace a chance at schooling, employment and political weight, is an important part of affirmative action in India. However, the impact of these laws in solving issues of socio-economic inequality and empowering population to shift to higher socio-economic status has been always questioned [2]. Criticizing the reservation laws in India is the main focus of this paper where focus will be given to the objectives formulated with the laws, the socio-economic implication and the difficulties confronting in eradicating caste-system prejudice. In looking at various shades of casteism and how reservations policies are effective in addressing the social injustice issue of imbalance in socio-economic status, the study will identify assets and liabilities of such policies. Furthermore, it will analyze possibilities for the reform of the reservation system in the sense of what enables it to fully deliver social justice for the downtrodden as envisioned while at the same time ensuring that the pigment behind the quota system does not perpetrate disadvantages based on caste system.

Therefore, this paper aims at presenting its findings in the larger debate on how to social justice in modern Indian caste system. Reservation policy based on caste in India has traditionally been the key policy to address the problems of social and economic disparities promoting justice for the deprived sections of society [3]. The reservation system, which only really targeted the SC and ST and the more recently included OBC's, was successful in opening doors to education, job opportunities as well as political power. However, the effects of this policy and especially as applied on different sector were even a matter of controversy.

The caste reservation policy in India was further examined by Sharma (2022) regarding the lives of Scheduled Caste engineers. The study showed that even though reservations have preserved necessary possibilities for social promotion, they do not remove a number of structural disadvantages, for example, discrimination and the deprivation of resources. This was in tandem with Sarki (2021)'s study on the effects of the reservation policy on the Scheduled Castes in Darjeeling Hills [4]. Sarki in a sociological analysis of the policy discovered that while the development and implementation of the policy was successful, the success rate was not harmonized throughout the regions. However, what is clear is that while the policy achieved many of the objectives it set out to accomplish it failed to always deal with the root causes of the discriminations based on the caste especially in the rural and underdeveloped areas.

Bose and Ahmed expanded the discussion to a measure of addressing the degeneration: reservation as a form of affirmative action and its negation by upper caste students of public universities. Some claimed that even though the concept of reservation was highly necessary to adjudge the educational void between the upper and lower castes, when the authorities decided to extend this facility toward economically weaker sections (EWS), it gave rise to subsequent discourses over equity and the economic repercussions for upper caste students. Some of them highlighted how economic criteria on the one hand, and caste criteria on the other were acute to decide about the quotas. The politics of reservation policy for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and its dynamism was further examined by Hasan in 2022 [5]. According to Hasan, although the policy of reservation was put in place for socio-economic issues, it was much political geographical which undermined its ability to do so. The socio-economic implications of caste-based reservation were also evident in the broader context of India's social fabric. [6] provided an analysis of religious violence and its socio-economic impacts, indirectly shedding light on how caste dynamics contributed to societal tensions. They suggested that while reservation policies alleviated some of the immediate economic disadvantages faced by marginalized communities, they did not fully mitigate the social conflicts arising from entrenched caste identities.

OBJECTIVES

1. To critically analyze the effectiveness of caste-based reservation laws in addressing socio-economic disparities and promoting social mobility among marginalized communities in India.
2. To explore potential reforms and strategies for enhancing the reservation system's impact on reducing caste inequity while fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Research Methodology

The research methodology is followed through quantitative research method by using a structured questionnaire to collect the primary data. Therefore, in order to collect varied opinions about the reservation and caste inequity, a sample size of 100 respondents will be used through convenient sampling. The questionnaire will be composed of both closed ended and Likert scale questions that will aim at getting respondents' views about the socio-economic impact of the reservation policy. Frequency distribution tables will be used to systematically analyze the collected data to present the responds in a format that makes easy identification of patterns and trends in the data. This will allow us to understand how various demographic groups consider the difficulties of the reservation system. Through analysis of the frequency of responses, the study will derive meaningful insights, in areas where the reservation laws do good or require improvement, and in aid of a better comprehensive understanding of their socio-economic impact.

Data analysis

The data collected through the structured questionnaire has been analyzed using frequency distribution tables to understand the respondents' views on the caste-based reservation system in India. The analysis explores three main areas: awareness of the reservation system, its perceived socio-economic impact, and suggestions for improvement.

Table 1: Awareness of the Reservation System

Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fully Aware	60	40
Somewhat Aware	50	33.33
Not Aware	40	26.67
Total	150	100

Analysis: The table shows that 40% of the respondents are fully aware of the reservation system, while 33.33% are somewhat aware. This indicates a relatively high level of awareness, though 26.67% of the sample still lacks complete knowledge. This gap suggests that awareness campaigns or further education on the reservation system could be beneficial, especially in underrepresented areas.

Table 2: Perceived Socio-Economic Impact of Reservation Policies

Socio-Economic Impact	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive Impact	75	50
Neutral Impact	50	33.33
Negative Impact	25	16.67
Total	150	100

Analysis: The majority of respondents (50%) perceive the reservation policies as having a positive socio-economic impact, particularly in terms of access to education and employment. However, 33.33% view the impact as neutral, indicating that some feel the benefits are not substantial or equally distributed. Only 16.67% see the policies negatively, citing concerns like perpetuating caste-based divisions and inefficiencies in implementation. These findings suggest that while the reservation system has had positive effects, its overall impact is still viewed with some skepticism.

Table 3: Suggestions for Improving Reservation Policies

Improvement Suggestion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Expand Reservations to EWS	70	46.67
Increase Education Opportunities for Marginalized Groups	50	33.33
Review Caste-Based Classification	30	20
Total	150	100

Analysis: According to the respondents, there are several improvement suggestions for the reservation system. Of particular note is support for expanding reservations to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) (46.67%), a shift towards addressing economic rather than solely caste specific inequities, and expanding access to education (33.33%)—both of which align with aims to reduce socio economic divides. A smaller group of 20 percent, proposes review of the classification based on caste to make it more inclusive and effective in the fight for inequality. It's also a wider push for change in how reservations are handled.

CONCLUSION

The overall research finally concludes with the awareness and mixed perceptions of the caste based reservation system in India.

The majority of respondents are in favour of the positive socio economic impact, but there is a strong demand for reform, in particular in the expansion of reservations to also include the economically weaker sections and improvement of educational opportunities for the socially weak. The findings show that the provision of reservation offers many benefits but also pose fairness and effectiveness challenges.

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