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RESERVATION AND ITS IMPACT ON ADMISSIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of reservation policies in India has been two-fold, i.e., social, economic and educational upliftment of SC and ST and attract a greater number of students towards higher education belonging to SC and ST classes in a significant manner. This paper aims to study the impact of reservation policies for admission of SC ST and OBC students in higher educational institutions in India. Data shows that such policies have successfully attracted a greater number of students from backward classes towards seeking higher education, which they would have refrained from without such reservation policies. This, in turn, increases their chances of getting employed in government sector by 1.4%. Besides, higher education also helps them develop skills and expertise which enables them to seek an opportunity of employment in private sector also without the aid of reservation. Thus, the makers of the Constitution have paved the way for people belonging to SC, ST and OBC classes to blend and form an integration with the upper strata of the Indian society and ensure a life of respect and social dignity.

Keywords: Reservation, social backwardness, scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, other backward class, higher education, upliftment.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1950s, the number of higher educational institutions and enrollment of students has shown a significant growth from 200,000 students to 7 million by the end of twentieth century. Since the implication of reservation policies in higher educational institutions, the representation of students belonging to SC and ST class has witnessed a slow yet effective growth in the number of SC and ST students. The percentage of admission of ST students have shown better results in this context with a growth from 1.6% to 2.7% within a time span of 20 years. On the other hand, this number rose from 7% to 7.8% for SC students within the period of 20 years, from 1970 to 1990. Thus, the representation of SC and ST students has rose to onehalf and one-third respectively in proportion to their population in the country regarding admission to higher educational institutions with the aid of reservation policy. According to statistics, SC and ST students are mostly enrolled in art programmes for higher education as compared to prestigious programmes such as engineering, law and medicine. Obviously, there is under-representation of SCs and STs in masters and PhD programmes. Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase in representation of number of students belonging to backward classes in higher education. Reservation policies for enrollment in higher education institutions has evidently motivated such students to make use of the policy and pursue higher education which would in turn accelerate social, economical and educational upliftment.



IMPACT OF RESERVATION ON SC AND ST ENROLLMENT

The attribution for slow yet effective educational upliftment of SC and ST citizens clearly belongs to implication of reservation in higher educational institutions. Although, it is not easy to identify the exact difference which is brought by these reservation policies. The cause of this shall mainly vest in the complex structure and administration of India's reservation policies applied by different educational institutions in the field of education. Another reason would be the implication of reservation in public institutions only under the control of state and central government wherein 15% seats are reserved for students belonging to scheduled caste and 7.5% seats belong to the members of scheduled tribes. Since the number of private institutions are growing rapidly after 1990, the non-applicability of reservation in such institutions does not seem to promote these policies. Though these policies were brought by the government in 1950s, there was significant delay in implementing them. Even now, they are not fully applicable in India in a proper and structured way.

For the purpose of reservation of seats in educational institutions, minimum qualifying marks are set properly for candidates belonging to SC and ST below the cut-off set for the general category. Although, it shall be noted that surprisingly such reserved seats go unfilled for enrollment in schools and other educational institutions because there is lack of applicants from these groups who have completed secondary education and wish to pursue higher education, or meet the requirement for admission. Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase in representation of number of students belonging to backward classes in higher education. Reservation policies for enrollment in higher education institutions has evidently motivated such students to make use of the policy and pursue higher education which would in turn accelerate social, economic and educational upliftment. This has been evidently proved by a study conducted by two scholars, Palshikar and Patwardhan in which they found that about 1/6th of a sample of SC and ST students who were admitted to reserved seats scored high enough in the entrance examination of a regional medical college in Pune, Maharashtra to have been admitted as general entry students.¹ Further, in case of OBC aspirants in reserved seats, this figure rose to around 5/6th as per the study.²

Therefore, there is no ambiguity in the fact that implication of reservation policies in educational institutions is an effective attempt of the Constitution makers to afford an equal

opportunity to SC and ST aspirants at the most prestigious Indian universities and other educational institutions for higher education, professional training and technical skill development, which are mostly under the control and management of central or state government. Without such policies, it would have been nearly impossible to grab such

¹Thomas E. Weisskopf, "Impact of Reservation on Admissions to Higher Education in India"³⁹ *Economic and Political Weekly* 4339 (2004).

² Id.

opportunities due to staunch prevalence of social inequalities and the rigid caste system. Reservation has made high quality primary, secondary and higher education possible for members of these groups, along with privately funded workshops and tutorials at concessional rates. Besides the case of elite institutions, a reasonable number of aspirants belonging to these backward groups score high enough in qualifying examinations for admissions, which are set for the general category candidates by some non-elite institutions as well. Even after all these efforts, there prevails a likelihood that a major number of students belonging to SC and ST groups have been encouraged to pursue higher education because of reservation policies. It may be concluded that these reservation policies have made a great difference in the lives of members belonging to backward groups. Around 7,00,000 of these students have successfully enrolled in higher education by the end of twentieth century. Undoubtedly, there is a reasonable increase in the number of students getting enrolled in higher education institutions for better education and in order to seek government employment in future over the recent decades.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SC AND ST STUDENTS AS THE BENEFICIARIES OF RESERVATION POLICIES

In the year 1965-66, Karlekar reports by the University Grant Commission (UGC), which conducted a survey in 15 universities found that only 36% of the total SC and ST students enrolled for higher education managed to pass their examinations. Chitnis conducted a survey in colleges which offered arts and science programmes for data collection in this regard during the late 1960s. The report submitted acknowledged the fact that the average academic performance of SC was worse than that of general category students. Another survey conducted by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) systematically reported that there is a higher rate of dropouts from college among the SC and ST groups, besides a poor academic performance.

Another detailed study was conducted by Aikara in the year 1980 on the basis of analyses of 10 colleges in Mumbai from the early 1970s. These colleges offered a number of programmes in different fields including arts, law, medicines, science and engineering. It was found that only 10 percent of total students belonged to the SC group and most of them got enrollment into private colleges while very few of these students secured a seat in government colleges for medical and engineering programmes. Between the year 1970 to 1973, only 23 percent of SC students passed their final examinations, whereas most students from the general category, approximately 52 percent, managed to pass clearly in their year-end examination, the rest of the students reportedly remained absent for their exams. Many of SC students, nearly 60 percent, dropped out of college in their second and third years of higher study. Aikara found that minority students who scored higher marks in academics, especially in the field of engineering and medicine, were an

exception. A great majority of these students suffered from high rates of wastage and stagnation and demonstrated lower score of academic performance and resulted in lack of progress as compared to students belonging to general category.

The most recent research was conducted in the most prestigious IITs by Kirpal and Gupta in the year 1999 on the performance of SC and ST students who were pursuing higher education in the field of engineering via acquiring the reserved seats. The two scholars found that the average percentage of graduation was 84 as compared to 94 percent of general students passing their final examination. The average dropout rate of SC and ST students significantly rose to 16% resulting in sheer wastage of reserved seats.

CONCLUSION

At all levels of higher education that prevails in India, reservation policies have tried to uplift the social and economic status of members belonging to SC and ST by availing an equal opportunity of education and employment in public sector by the government. Reservation policies have enabled at least 700,000 students belonging to SC and ST groups to gain access to quality higher education in the most elite educational government institutions of the country. Reservation policies have attracted a good deal of students not only in government employment but prior to that, towards high quality higher education in public institutions, most of which are managed and controlled by the government. In spite of all the efforts towards the government, we cannot deny the fact that the beneficiaries of reservation come disproportionately from the better off castes, including the creamy layer belonging OBC group. As a result, reservation policies have increased inequalities contrary to the object behind this policy.

The rate of graduation and academic scores of students belonging to these groups are especially worse than that of students belonging to general category. However, it is a proven fact that the gap between the scores of entrance examination to higher education of SC, ST students and that of the general category have narrowed over the past few years. Studies have further proved that SC and ST students who have pursued higher education government institutions mostly end up in well paid and responsible positions under the government of state or central government, attaining good social and economic status as expected from these policies. Therefore, positive discrimination policies like reservation in higher education must be understood as a medium to promote equality and integration of upper and lower castes in India so as to ensure social equality and eliminate the rigid and vague caste system.