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Perception of Students Regarding Reservation

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ABSTRACT:

For the purpose to advance social justice and guarantee equal opportunities for historically marginalized groups, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), India's reservation policy is a crucial affirmative action tactic. Students' perspectives of the reservation system are examined in this study, with particular attention paid to their comprehension of its regulations, constitutional support, and wider educational implications. The study uses structured surveys and a quantitative methodology to collect data from a wide range of students. The results show that 62% of respondents do not identify as reservation system beneficiaries, compared to just 38% who do, which probably affects how they see the necessity and fairness of the program. The majority of respondents (65%) belong to the Open/General category, a group often associated with concerns about how reservations affect merit-based competition.

Although most students (60%) agree that reservations are important for advancing social justice, a significant 40% disagree with the policy. There is a common perception that the system stifles competition in the workplace and in the classroom because many Open/General students may see reservations as a barrier to meritocracy, even while they accept the need for social justice. Furthermore, 87% of students favor equal competition possibilities, suggesting a preference for a meritocratic system in which everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive based on their skills, regardless of background. This draws attention to a conflict between the demands of fair competition in academic and professional contexts and the objectives of social fairness.

Concerns regarding possible abuse of the reservation system are also shown by the study; 57% of participants think that only a tiny percentage of people take advantage of the program, which calls into doubt its efficacy and equity. The results also show that there is a lot of resistance to the reservation system's expansion. Approximately 57% of respondents are against expanding reservations to private institutions, while 62% are against raising the current reservation quotas. These opinions are in line with worries that raising reservations could further erode academic standards and meritocracy. The study concludes by highlighting the continuous discussion surrounding the reservation system, with students voicing both support for its social justice goals and concerns about how it would affect equity, competition, and merit in education.

INTRODUCTION:

In India, the term "reservation" refers to the affirmative action program intended to give historically underprivileged and disenfranchised communities chances. Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) are among the groups that are given a specified percentage of seats in legislatures, government jobs, and educational institutions. This policy's main goal is to level the playing field for disadvantaged populations and redress the social and economic inequalities brought about by decades of discrimination. In order to advance social justice and equality, the government reserves these opportunities in order to give these groups access to resources, education, and jobs that they would not otherwise have.

The history of caste-based discrimination in India and the socioeconomic struggles of marginalized populations are the foundations of the reservation policy. Members of SCs, STs, and OBCs have historically experienced extreme social and economic marginalization and have frequently been denied equal work opportunities, education, and basic rights. It is believed that the reservation system is a remedial action that will enable disadvantaged communities to get over structural obstacles and engage in society more fairly. By giving these groups, the tools and chances they need to raise their socioeconomic standing and promote diversity and inclusion in important societal organizations, the system seeks to end the cycle of poverty and underrepresentation.

Reservations have been essential in the field of education in guaranteeing that kids from underprivileged backgrounds can get high-quality instruction. The strategy guarantees that underprivileged students are not left behind because of social or financial limitations by reserving seats in educational institutions, such as colleges and universities. They can pursue further education thanks to this system, which is frequently viewed as a first step toward improved employment opportunities and social mobility. Many students from underprivileged communities can now attend universities thanks to the reservation policy, which encourages diversity in classrooms and improves the educational experience for all students.

Yet, there is still much disagreement about India's reservation system. Although the system has made great progress toward advancing social fairness, detractors contend that it can also exacerbate separation and animosity across other communities. Some people doubt the policy's impartiality, especially when those from higher socioeconomic classes within these groups gain while the genuinely underprivileged are left behind. Others argue that as economic hardship is frequently a more urgent issue for many, reservations should be reframed to address economic necessity rather than being focused on caste and social standing. Also, there are worries that the reservation system would affect academic standards because opponents say it may lead to fewer admissions based on merit. The reservation system is still a crucial component of India's social justice initiatives in spite of these reservations, and debates concerning its future and possible changes are still going on.

SIGNIFICANCE

Given that India's affirmative action and reservation policies are intended to rectify past injustices and advance social justice, policymakers, educators, and the general public must have a thorough understanding of them. Examining how students view the reservation system in the classroom offers important information about their knowledge, acceptance, and reservations about the policy. These student viewpoints emphasize the continuous discussion about how to strike a balance between social justice and academic performance and are representative of larger cultural conversations on diversity, fairness, and meritocracy. Policymakers may improve the reservation system to better balance social justice and merit-based possibilities by looking at these divergent points of view. This will ultimately guarantee an equitable and effective educational system that benefits all facets of society.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Understanding Students' Attitudes Towards Affirmative Action in Higher Education" by N. S. Sabharwal (2024): Over 3,000 students were polled in 12 public colleges throughout India as part of this extensive study to find out how they felt about affirmative action. The results show that students' views on reservation rules are greatly influenced by their caste origin, financial standing, and individual experiences with discrimination. People who have experienced or observed caste-based discrimination are more likely to be in Favor of affirmative action because they think it righted past wrongs. Students from wealthy families, on the other hand, are more likely to be against reservations on the grounds that they unjustly give caste precedence over ability. The report highlights the sharply divided opinions on reservation laws and suggests that colleges encourage student discussion to dispel myths about affirmative action.

B. Kumar (2023) "Discrimination in Higher Education: The Exclusion of Dalit and Adivasi Students": The exclusion and discrimination that Dalit and Adivasi students experience at India's top universities is empirically supported by Kumar's research. The study finds a number of obstacles that keep students from succeeding in higher education, such as stereotyping, social exclusion, and biased grading systems. Peers and faculty frequently view Dalit and Adivasi students as academically weak, which has an impact on their confidence and involvement in class. According to Kumar, creating an equitable learning environment for all kids requires institutional changes including inclusive curricula, academic support programs, and anti-discrimination laws.

Swain, Nibedita (2020) Odisha as a Case Study on Reservation Policy and the Empowerment of Sc & St Women in India. to comprehend and elucidate reservation policy's theoretical stance. to research the various grounds for women's empowerment as well as the theoretical viewpoint on empowerment. to examine the connection between empowerment and reservation policies. to evaluate how reservation policies affect the empowerment of women from underrepresented groups. to talk about SC women's status and standing in Odisha. to talk about ST women's status and position in Odisha. to recommend actions for the reservation's empowerment process.

"Psychological Responses to Reservation-Based Discrimination" by Sharma and Subramanyam (2020): The psychological difficulties faced by students from reserved groups in higher education institutions are investigated in this qualitative study. According to the study, prejudices from teachers and peers frequently make these pupils feel alone and under pressure to succeed. Many people encounter subtle discrimination and microaggressions, which affects their academic performance and sense of self. According to the study, recipients of affirmative action internalize societal biases, which causes tension and worry. In order to overcome these obstacles, Sharma & Subramanyam advise colleges to put in place mentorship programs, counselling services, and workshops to raise faculty awareness in order to foster a welcoming learning environment for students from underrepresented groups.

A critical analysis of educational institutions' reservation policies for admission (2018) The goal of the research is to thoroughly examine how the reservation policy for admission to educational institutions is being implemented. to evaluate and analyse the reservation policy's true necessity. 16 execution of the reservation policy and to determine if the government has met the required reservation quotes for admission to government-run and government-aided educational institutions in India. to outline the new problems with India's reservation policies. must remove the limiting impact of their upbringing in order to instil competency motivation in these kids. to pique their interest in learning and integrate them into the educational system by giving them suitable chances.

"Caste in Modern India: Going Beyond Discrimination and Exclusion" by S. S. Jodhka (2015): Jodhka's research explores how caste-based exclusion continues to impact social interactions in modern-day India. According to the findings, latent biases persist in higher education even though overt discrimination has declined. Many students from disadvantaged groups report encountering prejudice in teacher interactions, class discussions, and grading. The survey claims that since they are afraid of discrimination, students in the reserved category usually refuse to disclose their caste identities. Jodhka argues that academic institutions must actively support caste-sensitivity activities, facilitate social integration, and provide fair grading practices in order to combat marginalization.

METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVE:

- To understand the reservation policy.

- To understand the constitutional provisions of affirmative action and reservation policy of India.

- To understand the student's perception regarding reservation policy.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Questionnaires are frequently used as the main tool for gathering data in descriptive research studies that use a quantitative research design. The objective of this kind of research is to collect comprehensive, numerical data in order to characterize the traits, actions, or viewpoints of a particular group or phenomenon. With its thoughtfully constructed closed-ended questions, the questionnaire makes it possible to gather quantitative data that can be statistically examined. This form offers a thorough picture of the topic being studied and is perfect for finding patterns, trends, and relationships within the data. The study guarantees that the results are legitimate and dependable by employing a systematic strategy, providing lucid insights into the research issue.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTONS:

This study used a questionnaire-style data collection procedure. In order to collect relevant data on the research topic, this method entails giving respondents a set of structured questions, usually including both closed-ended and open-ended items. While open-ended questions could provide more in-depth analysis and qualitative viewpoints, closed-ended questions offer quantitative data that can be scientifically examined. In order to guarantee accurate and trustworthy responses, the questionnaire is made to be simple to read and comprehend. By effectively gathering data from a large number of participants, this strategy makes it easier to analyse patterns and trends in the study's findings.

UNIVERSE:

200 students from Parul University's Faculty of Social Work in Vadodara, Gujarat, make up the study's universe. These students provide a precise and targeted group for the research because they are representative of the target population from which data will be gathered. In order to ensure that the results are applicable to the student body in the university's Faculty of Social Work, the study intends to collect information and examine a number of aspects pertaining to this demographic. The scope and context of the research can be clearly understood thanks to this defined universe.

SAMPLING METHOD:

Simple random sampling was the sampling strategy working in this study. This method guarantees that each of the 200 students from Parul University's Faculty of Social Work has an equal chance of being chosen to take part in the research. The study attempts to remove any bias and guarantee that the sample is representative of the broader population by choosing participants at random. Because there is less chance of any systematic mistakes affecting the results, this approach improves the findings' generalizability and dependability.

SAMPLE:

The study's sample comprises 60 students who were chosen from the 200 students enrolled in Parul University's Faculty of Social Work. These 60 individuals were selected at random using basic random sampling, guaranteeing that every student had an equal chance of becoming a part of the study. This sample size is thought to be adequate to preserve statistical validity and reliability while offering significant insights. By concentrating on this group, the study hopes to make inferences that are applicable to the larger student body of the university's Faculty of Social Work.

FINDINGS

- The Indian government has taken a number of actions since gaining independence to support educational opportunities for Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs). These initiatives are based on a number of constitutional articles, such as Articles 15(4), 29, 30, 45–46, and 350(A), which seek to improve neglected populations and advance educational growth.

- By guaranteeing that no citizen is excluded from any owned by the state educational institution or from obtaining public funding on the basis of religion, caste, language, or any combination of these, Article 29 of the Constitution promotes the interests of minorities. This section also highlights the dedication to equitable access to education and non-discrimination for all citizens.

- There are questions over the successful implementation of reservation laws in higher education given the majority of General Category professors at IITs and IIMs. According to RTI data from September 2024, more than 90% of teachers at least two IITs and three IIMs fall into the General Category, but the percentage varies between 80 and 90% at six other IITs and four other IIMs. The difference raises concerns about whether quota regulations are being properly enforced or whether larger structural changes are required to guarantee more diversity in India's best universities. It also shows systemic difficulties in professor recruitment.

- It is commonly believed that reservations are "promoting caste." Given that OBC candidates are being denied reservations at the all-India level through the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET), it is even more strange that this issue is still relevant today. Since 2017, 11,000 applicants from underprivileged backgrounds are thought to have been refused admission to medical and dental schools nationwide as a result of this. Their basically insignificant presence in state and central universities as well as other institutions is comparable with this denial of representation.

- Argument in favour of reservation, the deprived caste has been oppressed from the start, despite social, political, and educational advancement, it continues to live in poverty and is cut off from its privileges. A reservation could be one approach against these cultures.

- Over time, the socioeconomic standing of underprivileged areas can improve as a result of improved employment prospects brought about by access to high-quality education through reservations.

- Argument against reservation in India, the caste system used to make Indian reservations is unfair. Since many members of the other castes are truly struggling, they need a reservation in order to protect their rights and equal standing within society. Since the SC and STs lack a creamy layer, many members of the reserve group enjoy the luxury of not having to make reservations.

- In order to guarantee that aid reaches the most vulnerable, opponents argue that affirmative action should also take economic hardship into consideration. They point out that caste-based reservations do not take into account economic gaps within communities.

- A majority of respondents belong to the Open/General category (65%), while the rest are distributed among SEBC (23%), Scheduled Caste (7%), Scheduled Tribe (2%), and EWS (3%). The dominance of the General category among respondents could reflect biases or grievances about the reservation system, as they do not benefit from it directly.

- 50% of respondents believe that the reservation policy is "somewhat effective" in promoting social justice, while only 12% find it very effective. The remaining responses include 13% who find it not effective and 25% who remain neutral, indicating mixed perceptions of its success in addressing historical injustices.

CONCLUSION:

Conclusions show that opinions about reservation laws in India are nuanced and conflicted, reflecting both worries about their application and the need for them for social justice. Even while reservations have been crucial in improving underprivileged communities by offering work and educational opportunities, problems including unfairness, meritocracy, and exploitation remain serious obstacles. The effectiveness of affirmative action in higher education is called into doubt by the majority of General Category teachers in highly regarded colleges like IITs and IIMs. Public opinion is still divided as well, many people think that reservation laws need to be changed, especially to address caste-based disadvantages and economic inequality. In the future, promoting equal chances and lowering societal problems will require a well-rounded strategy that upholds meritocracy while guaranteeing inclusivity.

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