CASTE-EDUCATION SYNDROME IMPACT OF RESERVATIONS ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
The object of this study is to measure the effect of reservations on its various stakeholders, particularly, under-graduate educational institutions. The paper will seek to achieve answers to questions like whether reservations have enabled better access to under-graduate courses in educational institutions, whether students from the reserved categories have been able to perform at par with those from the general category, whether the result of the institute is affected by reservations and various others in order to uncover the truth behind the effect of this policy. For this purpose an empirical method of research has been adopted and data has been collected through a questionnaire from various universities and colleges. The questionnaire itself has been divided into three stages. The first stage tries to find answer to the question whether the reserved category students from marginalized backgrounds are actually able to get access in institutions offering undergraduate courses. The second stage, focuses on the performance of the students throughout their college life and the third, focuses on their future prospects. These in turn, reflect upon the impact of the policy on the educational institution.

KEYWORDS: reservation, quota, backward, performance, education, institution

1. Introduction
On 31st July 2012, the University of Delhi released a notification requiring all colleges to furnish details about the total number of seats left vacant in Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories after the formal admissions process. The notification was released in the wake of disproportionate filling of seats in these categories as against those in General category. Almost a year prior to the notification, on 8th August 2011, the Supreme Court in the case of P.V. Indiresan v. Union of India and Ors.1 clarified the procedure to be followed for admissions of OBC candidates to Central Educational Institutions. Apart from clarifying the meaning of the term ‘cut-off’ marks, the Supreme Court set the datum for OBC admissions at 10% below the minimum qualifying marks set for general category candidates. One of the major reasons behind the petition was the increasing number of seats being left vacant in the OBC category and their subsequent conversion to general category seats. Thus, it is not difficult to say, on a prima facie basis, that the actual benefit of reservations is not wholly reaching its intended beneficiaries and the concern with respect to the filling of reserved category seats in Central Educational Institutions is not unfounded.

The object of this study was to measure the effect of this policy on its various stakeholders, particularly, under-graduate educational institutions. The paper has sought to achieve answers to

1 (2011) 8 SCC 441
questions like whether reservations have enabled better access to under-graduate courses in educational institutions, whether students from the reserved categories have been able to perform at par with those from the general category, whether the result of the institute is affected by reservations, are reservations the only answer to uplift socially and educationally backward classes of the society, and various others in order to uncover the truth behind the effect of the policy of reservation. For this purpose an empirical method of research had been adopted and data has been collected through a questionnaire from various universities and colleges. The questionnaire itself had been divided into three stages. The first stage (I) tried to find answer to the question whether the reserved category students from marginalized backgrounds are actually able to access institutions offering undergraduate courses. The second stage (II), focused on the performance of the students throughout their college life and the third (III), focused on their future prospects. These in turn, reflect upon the impact of the policy on the educational institution.

2. Research Methodology

The research was carried out in nine colleges spread across four renowned universities of Delhi spanning two weeks. There were two types of questionnaires, namely, Form A and Form B. Form A (Stage I) was framed so as to get a rough estimate of the percentage of reserved category students who are able to access higher education after passing their higher secondary exams. It contained basic questions like total number of seats in the college, number of seats reserved for SCs/STs/OBCs, percentage of reserved category seats that get filled each year and percentage of reserved category students who drop out each year. These forms were filled by the administrative staff of the respective colleges.

Form B was divided in two parts, Stage II (Performance and Consistency) and Stage III (Future prospects). Stage II contained questions with regards to the percentage of reserved category students performing at par with those from general category in academics, percentage of reserved category students actively taking part in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and effect of reservations on the college atmosphere. Stage II consisted of questions like percentage of reserved category students who get placed through college placements and their future prospects. The questionnaires were framed in a manner that any administrative staff member or actively teaching faculty member could answer them based on their collective experience. Apart from the students, teachers being secondary stakeholders, their opinion can be said to be reliable to arrive at rough estimates about the performance of reserved category students. I had handed over the questionnaires to various friends and contacts in these universities who helped me get these forms filled from professors, teachers and the administrative staff.

3. Form A – Stage I (Access) – Results & Conclusions

In September 2012, All India Survey on Higher Education conducted by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development came out with its Pilot report indicating a steep 3.8% rise in the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER). The GER for the year 2009-2010 which was 15% now stood at 18.8% for the years 2011-2012. Although, the OBCs comprised of 27.1% as against their share of 27% in the total population of India, the GER for SCs and STs stood abysmally low at 10.2% and 4.4% as against their national population of 16.2% and 8.2% respectively.2 Although these

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2 The Hindu, “Enrolment of OBC students in colleges goes up, that of SC, ST still low: survey”, 29th September 2012, New Delhi
figures are better than those of previous years, the average mean seems to remain constantly proportionate to the growing population.

In an article published in the Economic and Political Weekly in September 2004, Professor Thomas E. Weisskopf of the University of Michigan reviewed the then available evidence on the consequences of reservation policies as implemented over the past half century in admissions to higher educational institutions in India. Referring to various studies he catalogued that although there had been an increase in SC/ST representation with respect to their total population from the late 1970s (SC 7%; ST 1.6%) to the late 1990s (SC 7.8%; ST 2.7%), the increment in the total SC/ST graduate population had been lesser from 1961 to 1981. He also remarked that in most cases it was the urban elite which had access to reserved seats, though most of them could gain entry even through the general category. Such culture, he remarked, was leading to the creation of sub-castes within the SCs and the STs, which if according to one study was tragic for the fellow community, according to the other was beneficial to the general untouchable population—by enabling them to play a stronger role and more independent role as leaders of their own community. Another observation made in the study was with respect to the entry level scores of SC/ST/OBC candidates and those of general category candidates. The gap between the scores was found to be narrowing.

3.1. Enrollment in Engineering

Three technical institutions providing B.Tech degrees were analysed. These institutions were namely Guru Tegh Bahadur Institute of Technology (GTBIT, Shri Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University), Netaji Subhash Institute of Technology (NSIT, University of Delhi) and Maharaja Surajmal Institute of Technology (MSIT, Shri Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University). Entrance to IP University colleges is through an entrance examination conducted by IP University whereas entrance to NSIT is through the All India Engineering Entrance Examination (AIEEE) conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Hence, understandably the level of competition is significantly higher at all India level than at the IP University entrance examination since most of the IP University colleges are located in and around Delhi only, whereas those colleges affiliated to AIEEE are scattered all over India. Estimates suggest that roughly 85% of the candidates taking IP University examination for entry into engineering courses are from Delhi itself.

The results show that almost all seats reserved for SC/ST and OBC categories were filled in MSIT. The data for GTBIT was unavailable because the college has a 70% Sikh quota and data about the SC/ST/OBC reservation was unavailable with the administration staff. However, data from NSIT revealed that on an average less than 25% seats in reserved categories were filled every year. It is pertinent to note here that since the majority students taking the IP University engineering entrance examination are from Delhi, they are better exposed to proper training opportunities and material for entrance preparations and hence, the enrollment rates of reserved category students are far better. It is an undeniable fact that location of SCs/STs and OBCs, the attitude of people towards SCs/STs and OBCs in that location are major factors that influence the

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4 Sacchidananda (1977): The Harijan Elite, Thomas Press, New Delhi  
5 Mendelsohn, O and M Vicziany (1998): The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India, Cambridge University Press, UK
upbringing and mentality of socially and educationally backward classes of the society. Another reason which can be attributed to this observation is based on the assumption that SC/ST and OBC people from a region like Delhi are better economically placed than their counterparts from other states. Hence, better atmosphere and lesser competition helps SC/ST and OBC candidates prefer get through IP University. Similarly, the reverse phenomenon noticed in NSIT may be explained by the huge number of students from diverse backgrounds (maybe better off or worse off) appearing for AIEEE. SC/ST and OBC candidates may not prefer far off institutions even if they score requisite marks because of their inferior financial status. Another reason behind such low enrollment could be the inability to score minimum qualifying marks for admission into the program of their choice.

3.2. Enrollment in Medical, Architecture and Management Courses

To study enrollment of reserved category students in medical courses, data was taken from Maulana Azad Medical College (Delhi University). Entrance to this college till 2011 was through the Delhi Pre-Medical Test, but it has now been changed to All India Pre-Medical Test. The administrative staff of the college indicated that only 25-50% of the reserved category seats were filled every year.

In Architecture, the percentage of reserved category seats getting filled by SC/ST or OBC was below 25%. Data was taken from M.B.S. School of Planning and Architecture (IP University). IP University conducts its own exam for entrance to Architecture courses.

In Management courses (BBA) however, the percentage of reserved category seats getting filled was almost 100%. Data was taken from Maharaja Surajmal Institute (MSI) (IP University). The University holds its own Common Entrance Examination based upon the rankings of which, the students are allotted colleges and sub-streams.

3.3. Dropout Rate

It is noteworthy that the dropout rate in all colleges from amongst the reserved category students was almost negligible or nil.

3.4. Conclusion

SC/ST and OBC students from Delhi perform better in local examinations than in all India level examinations. Due to the absence of data on their performance in all India examinations their performance on that front cannot be precisely determined. However, based on the above data, since SC/ST and OBC students are not able to get through both elite technical and medical institutions, where the entrance examination is at all India level, it can be deduced that their performance at the national level is below satisfactory. Also, it can be said that students from more affluent backgrounds or the cream from amongst the reserved categories have a higher chance of clearing entrance examinations than those belonging to actual socially and educationally backward classes of the society. Various factors like parents’ education, place of residence or schooling and financial capability of SC/ST and OBC students also affect their ability to access higher education.
4. Form B – Stage II (Performance and Consistency) – Results & Conclusions

Professor Weisskopf noted in his article that the number of reserved category students in the most desirable courses like engineering, medicine and law was considerably lower than that in non-professional traditional courses like arts and sciences. Also, the condition of the students admitted to elite institutions under reserved category was heartbreaking. In a study done by Aikara⁶, it was found that the passing rate of reserved category students was far lower than that of general category students. However, owing to the lesser number of seats in medical colleges, reserved category students performed considerably well. Apart from lesser number of seats, it was also found that these students were well motivated and considerably more skilled than their counterparts. Most of these students had good previous academic records and belonged to the fortunate class of SCs. Another reason behind better access and performance of reserved category candidates, as suggested by Patwardhan and Palshikar⁷ (1992), may be attributed to second generation beneficiaries.

It may also be worth mentioning here, the initiatives taken by various elite institutions especially IITs for making available remedial courses to reserved category students⁸. The purpose behind conducting these remedial courses is to help overcome students from reserved categories, the various barriers they face, like those of language and culture. Such state sponsored compulsory remedial courses truly reflect the commitment of those institutions to maintaining high standards of academic excellence. The following is an attempt to gain a rough estimate of the performance of reserved category students through their years at college.

All respondents who filled Form B were college teachers and professors. A total of 33 filled forms were received. Nine colleges spread across nine universities were considered for this purpose. The colleges considered were National Law University, Delhi, Symbiosis Law School, Noida (Symbiosis International University), Shri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce (University of Delhi), Netaji Subhash Institute of Technology (University of Delhi), Maulana Azad Medical College (University of Delhi), Maharaja Surajmal Institute of Technology (IP University), Guru Tegh Bahadur Institute of Technology (IP University), M.B.S. School of Planning and Architecture (IP University) and Maharaja Surajmal Institute (IP University).

4.1. **Academic Performance**

Pie Chart 1. illustrates the percentage of reserved category students performing at par with General Category students in academics at college. 40% of the respondents think that the percentage of reserved category students performing at par with students from the general category is 25-50%. The most popular belief behind this opinion was that students from reserved categories often lack adequate academic training and capability due to poor educational backgrounds. Most of them come from marginalized backgrounds and often have little access to decent education. 24% opined that they perform rather poorly or barely manage to pass, i.e. the percentage of reserved category students performing at par with general category students is less than 25%. An equal number of respondents believed that about 50-75% of the reserved category students perform at par with general category students. A mere 9% thought that almost all

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⁸ The Indian Express, Pritha Chatterjee and Naveed Iqbal, “Unlike IIT, No Mechanism at AIIMS to help quota students”, 6th March 2012, New Delhi
performed at par with general category students. It is important to note here that it in most medical colleges, students perform at par with general category students. Since there are already very few seats in medical colleges, those who make the mark are from well off families who had been doing academically well previously as well.

4.2. **Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Performance**

Pie Chart 2. illustrates the percentage of reserved category students actively taking part in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. About 36% of the respondents opined that less than 25% students from reserved categories actively take part in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. 33% respondents believed that the percentage of such reserved category students was between 50-75%, while 27% believed that the percentage of such students was between 25-50%.

**Pie Chart 1.** Percentage of Reserved category students performing at par with General Category Students:

![Academic Performance Pie Chart](image)

**Pie Chart 2.** Percentage of Reserved category students actively taking part in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities:
4.3. **College Atmosphere**
Approximately 88% of the respondents believed that there was no change in the college atmosphere due to presence of reserved category students. No groups showed any kind of intolerance or hostile attitude towards any other. They seemed to suggest that the college atmosphere was generally healthy and that reserved category candidates were not looked down upon by their general category counterparts. However, one of the opinions that stood out was that students from reserved categories sometimes feel shy and are more introvert.

4.4. **Job Preference**
Approximately 77% of the respondents opined that reserved category students take up or are more inclined to take government jobs after completing their studies. Those from fields like business administration, though, are likely to take jobs in the private sector or pursue master’s programs in business administration. One interesting opinion was that a majority of reserved category students, from non-elite institutions, or those not pursuing desirable courses, join politics at various levels beginning as party workers.

5. **Final Remarks**
This opinion based survey reveals that though reserved category students are not performing at par with those from the general category, various data discussed by leading studies like those of Professor Thomas E. Weisskopf and that conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences suggest that such performance does not have a great impact on the educational institution per se. To expect a level playing field would mean turning a blind eye to the centuries of social discrimination faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. The recent study by TISS points some fascinating changes in the stream of thought that invigorates affirmative action policies. In February 2009, the TISS conducted an empirical study to analyze

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the OBC reservation policy for Higher Education in India in three states namely, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. According to the report, it was found that across all three states reservations had not diluted the merit in government colleges as compared to private colleges. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the cut-off marks for OBC and MBC (most backward classes) categories are very close to each other and in fact, government colleges record higher cut-offs than private colleges. Similarly, performance in the six technical courses, analyzed in Uttar Pradesh, SC/ST students had a higher passing percentage than general category and OBC students. However, according to the report, the reasons behind such an effect may be observed because SC/ST students from well off families continue to perform better. The state of Tamil Nadu has been practicing reservations since 1821, Maharashtra since 1960s and Uttar Pradesh since late 1970s. Though the process has been slow Tamil Nadu has been successful in eliminating the difference between Other Backward classes and Most Backward Classes on the one hand and other higher castes on the other. Similarly, the condition of SCs in Uttar Pradesh seems considerably better while the performance of reserved category students in medical courses in Maharashtra colleges has been growing tremendously. Hence, based upon the above data and related observations it may be said that the impact of reservation policies on educational institutions is not in the least, negative. However, the policy comes with its own drawbacks. The results are seen only over a long period of time and there is no guarantee of their being in consonance with the objectives of the policy. It also requires institutes to invest more in skill development so that such students do not lag behind their general category counterparts. Apart from these, as it has become visible over the years, the policy is prone to misuse. Faking of caste certificates and undue appeasement of various communities, irrespective of their ‘social’ or ‘educational’ backwardness, for political gain are events incidental to reservation. Under para 4.4. above, it has been observed, that majority of reserved category students opt for government jobs after their graduation, thus, again utilizing reservations in government jobs and then subsequently in promotions even. This has led to what may be called the institutionalization of the caste system in India, a result completely contrary to the expectations of the members of the constituent assembly. When Article 15(4) of the Constitution of India does not expressly provide for reservations and offers room for alternatives, one finds it hard to believe that reservations were the only answer to upliftment of socially and educationally backward classes of the society. For quite some time now, scholars, teachers, activists and other civil society members have unanimously voiced one concern in so far as the continuance of the policy is concerned, the need to ensure quality primary and secondary education in rural as well as urban set ups which are the cradle of all future generations in India.

6. Bibliography