



QUOTA-WITHIN-QUOTAS – POLITY

NEWS: Recent debates have questioned whether a 'quota-within-quota' system is needed to ensure that affirmative action policies are more equitable across Scheduled Caste subgroups.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Introduction to Reservation System

- **Purpose:** India's reservation system was designed to uplift historically marginalized communities, primarily Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- **Objective:** It aims to correct centuries of social and economic exclusion, providing SCs and STs access to education, government jobs, and public offices.

Emergence of Quota Disparities

- **Issue of Unequal Benefits:** Over 75 years post-independence, there is evidence that some SC subgroups benefit more from reservations than others, leading to disparities within the SC category.
- **Recent Debates:** A Supreme Court ruling and discussions in several states have highlighted the need to consider a 'quota-within-quota' system to ensure fair distribution among SC subgroups.

Proposal for 'Quota-Within-Quota'

- **Subdividing SC Quotas:** The proposal suggests dividing the SC quota further to provide targeted support to more disadvantaged SC communities.
- **State Experiments:** States like Punjab have attempted this model, while others like Bihar have faced challenges, often due to political pressures diluting the policy's intent.

Diverse State Experiences

- **Punjab's Success:** In Punjab, subdividing the SC quota has reportedly benefited marginalized SC groups (e.g., Mazhabi Sikhs, Balmikis).
- **Mixed Outcomes in Bihar:** Bihar's creation of a "Mahadalit" category initially targeted disadvantaged SCs, but political pressures led to broader inclusion, reducing the policy's effectiveness.
- **No Significant Need in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu:** In states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, SC subgroups show similar socio-economic progress, making subdivision unnecessary.

Barriers to Reservation Access

- **Lack of Caste Certificates:** Data reveals that in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, less than 50% of SC households have caste certificates, limiting access to reserved positions.



- **Better Access in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh:** Higher percentages of SC households in these states possess certificates, allowing better access to reserved benefits.



Challenges of 'Quota-Within-Quota' Implementation

- **Risk of Political Influence:** Decisions on subgroup inclusion often follow political motives rather than data-driven need, undermining affirmative action's purpose.
- **Supreme Court's Creamy Layer Suggestion:** The idea of excluding wealthier SCs (similar to OBC's 'creamy layer') is debated, with concerns about its impact on historically marginalized groups.

Economic Mobility vs. Social Stigma

- **Persistent Discrimination:** Despite economic progress, SCs continue to face covert and overt discrimination in jobs, housing, and other social spaces.
- **Role of Reservation in Creating Dalit Middle Class:** The reservation system has helped establish a Dalit middle class, potentially aiding in long-term stigma reduction.

Data as a Foundation for Reform

- **Need for Comprehensive Data:** A delayed national census hinders the availability of recent data on caste-based disparities, crucial for evidence-based reform.
- **Incomplete Evidence Risks:** Without updated data, reservation reform decisions are made based on outdated information, impacting policy effectiveness.



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Conclusion

- **Reservations as a Social Justice Tool:** The system has lifted millions out of poverty, but it requires updates to address internal SC disparities and maintain focus on reducing SC-upper caste gaps.
- **Call for Robust Implementation:** For continued efficacy, reservation policies must be grounded in accurate data and genuine need, minimizing political manipulation.

Source: <https://thehindu.com/news/national/does-data-justify-subdivision-of-quotas/article68810384.ece>

