

CASTE BASED RESERVATION IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION, SPECIFICALLY IN CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT:

This research focuses on caste-based reservations in the context of education. It aims to understand how people perceive the reservation system and its impact. The study reveals that most respondents are against caste-based reservations, expressing the view that it should instead be based on economic conditions. The research highlights the importance of caste-based reservations while also examining public opinion and awareness regarding the policy. Primary data has been used to collect information for this study. The findings show that a majority of respondents believe reservations should depend on economic status, although many agree that reservations have improved the lifestyle of some individuals.

Keywords: Reservation, Research, Respondents and Economic

INTRODUCTION:

Reservation in India is all about reserving access to seats in government jobs, educational institutions, and legislatures for certain sections of the population. It is also known as positive discrimination. Reservation in India is a government policy backed by the Indian Constitution. The origin of reservation dates to when the Brahmins came to the southern region, occupied it, and gradually ruled kingdoms and many temples. They created inequality through Manu Dharma and similar systems, which prohibited certain people from entering temples; everyone should work only on their family education program (kulakalvi); nobody should work beyond their role. Those who violated these rules were severely punished, including women. For many centuries, people suffered due to this discrimination.

When the British ruled the country, inequality began to change slowly. After independence, reservation policies were introduced to uplift marginalized groups. However, before the British period, many were denied equal opportunities. Even today, some students avoid SC/ST scholarships because people from other castes often score very high marks, making it difficult for SC/ST individuals to compete. When SC/ST students with lower marks are admitted to college, it can cause discontent among other castes.

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar said, “Slavery does not merely mean a legalized form of subjection. It means a state of society in which some men are forced to accept from others the purpose which controls their conduct.”

The Constitution of India adopts the unique feature of reservation. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word reserve means “something that you keep for a special reason or to use at a later date,” and the term reservation means “a seat, table, room, etc., that you have booked.”

In the Indian context, reservation refers to the act of reserving a fixed number of seats in government jobs, legislatures, and educational institutions for the weaker sections of society. The term weaker includes people who are socially and educationally backward due to a lack of resources and the caste system prevalent in Indian society. The reservation policy was introduced for them as an affirmative action to ensure adequate representation of backward classes in every service under the state.

Historical Background

In Hinduism, the caste system divides people into four categories or varnas — Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. According to Hindu beliefs, these four varnas originated from Brahma, the creator of the universe. The caste system is considered a distorted form of the original Varna system.

In this hierarchy, Brahmins were at the top, believed to have originated from Brahma's head. They were considered intellectuals and worked as teachers and priests. The Kshatriyas, supposedly from Brahma's arms, were rulers and warriors. Vaishyas, from Brahma's thighs, were traders, artisans, and farmers. At the bottom were the Shudras, believed to have originated from Brahma's feet.

They performed the menial jobs of society.

This caste system still exists to some extent in society and creates the need for the reservation policy in India. Caste-based discrimination, leading to social backwardness, is the root cause of the origin of the reservation policy.

Development of Reservation Policy

The idea of a reservation policy in India was originally developed by William Hunter and Jyotirao Phule in 1882. The basic principle behind reservation was to address the caste system and the practice of untouchability in India. However, the modern reservation system was introduced in 1932 by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in the form of the Communal Award. When India gained independence in 1947, the Constitution-makers faced the challenge of social discrimination based on caste. Therefore, provisions for reservation for socially backward classes were included in the Constitution of India. Initially, reservations were introduced for a period of ten years and only for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). However, it has been extended repeatedly with several modifications.

In 1980, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) were also included in the reservation system following the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. In 2007, reservation was implemented in all India quota seats, with 15% reserved for SCs and 7.5% for STs. On 14 January 2019, the 103rd Constitutional Amendment was enforced, providing 10% reservation for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) in the general category under Articles 15(6) and 16(6) of the Constitution of India.

Reservation in Educational Institutions

In 2005, the government introduced the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which inserted Article 15(5) into the Constitution of India.

Article 15(5) provides that: “Nothing in this article or in sub-clause (g) of clause (1) of Article 19 shall prevent the State from making any special provision, by law, for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes insofar as such special provisions relate to their admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions,

whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of Article 30.”

This amendment provides reservations to socially and educationally backward classes in relation to admissions in public and private educational institutions. However, it was challenged on the ground that it violated the principle of equality and the basic structure of the Constitution.

Current Scenario and Social Debate

Reservation remains a major issue in Indian society, especially in rural areas. There are many controversial opinions on this topic. Some argue that upper-caste people can also be economically weak, while some lower-caste people may be economically strong. Hence, they demand reservations based on economic status. However, this argument often overlooks the historical context. For centuries, upper-caste people have enjoyed privileges and benefits regardless of their economic status. The government is not responsible for their current situation, as they already have access to rights and opportunities for a long time.

In contrast, lower-caste people have only recently started receiving the benefits of reservation policies. While some individuals from these groups may now be economically well-off, they still face social discrimination and limited opportunities.

Currently, the state government education quota is as follows: 1% for STs, 18% for SCs, 26.5% for BCs, 3.5% for BC Muslims, 20% for MBC, and a total of 69%.

And in India, 7.5% for ST, 15% for SC, 27% for OBC, 10% for EWS and a total of 59.50%.

Despite these efforts, conflicts still arise among SC/ST and other caste communities. The only solution is to ensure that people are well informed about the facts of the reservation system. When awareness increases, misunderstandings and misinformation decrease.

Therefore, spreading awareness about reservation policies is essential to build social harmony and promote equality in India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Inderjeet Santhosh and Om Dutt (2023), The research paper titled “Reservation System in India: Is it Indispensable?” examines whether caste-based reservation in India is still necessary or has become a permanent part of society. It discusses the historical background, constitutional provisions, and major Supreme Court judgments such as Champakam Dorairajan (1951), Indra Sawhney (1992), and M. Nagaraj (2006). Using a doctrinal research method, the study analyzes constitutional amendments and legal developments to understand the evolution and impact of reservation policies. The paper finds that reservation, though intended as a temporary affirmative action for social upliftment, has become deeply embedded in Indian society. It highlights that while reservation has helped uplift marginalized groups, it has also created issues of reverse discrimination and inefficiency. The study concludes that social, educational, and economic criteria should be considered together to identify truly deserving beneficiaries. It emphasizes that reservations should not continue indefinitely but be reformed to ensure equality and efficiency, while simultaneously working to eliminate caste-based discrimination from society.

Dr. G. Yoganandham, et.al (2023), “An evaluation of the reservation system in India” The research paper studies how India’s reservation system functions to promote equality and uplift marginalized groups such as

SCs, STs, OBCs, and EWS. The researchers used theoretical and observational (doctrinal) methods, analyzing secondary data from books, reports, census records, and government documents. The study reviews historical developments, constitutional provisions, and judicial decisions to evaluate how reservation policies operate, especially in Tamil Nadu. The findings reveal that although reservation has improved social mobility and representation, benefits are unevenly distributed, with smaller Scheduled Castes still left behind. The paper suggests that reservations should be need-based and restructured to truly help disadvantaged groups. It emphasizes that reservation alone cannot remove inequality—education, awareness, and targeted welfare schemes are also essential. The study concludes that reform, fair implementation, and monitoring are required to ensure reservation fulfills its purpose of achieving real equality and social justice.

Manosanta Biswas (2018), The paper “Reservation Policy in India: Urge for Social Justice and Equality in Education and Government Services” discusses how caste-based inequalities led to the introduction of reservation policies for SCs, STs, and OBCs to promote equality. Using qualitative analysis and secondary data, it studies the impact of these policies on education and government jobs. The findings show that reservations have improved literacy and employment among disadvantaged groups but not enough to achieve full equality. Benefits are often taken by the relatively better-off within these communities, leaving the poorest still deprived. The author concludes that stronger implementation and reforms are needed to make the reservation policy more effective and truly just.

Mr. Sushant Rai (2025), The paper “Reservation: The Untold Truth of Existence” studies the history and impact of India’s reservation system. It traces its origin from the varna system to the British colonial period, when early reforms were introduced. Major events like the Communal Award and Poona Pact are discussed to show how representation for marginalized groups evolved. The research uses secondary data, government reports, and legal cases to analyze the system’s development. It highlights Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s vision of equality and empowerment through education. The study finds that political misuse has reduced the true purpose of reservation. It suggests economic and merit-based reforms to improve fairness. Overall, the paper concludes that reservation is still necessary but needs modern restructuring for real social justice.

Ade Mallesham (2024), The paper “An Overview of Reservation System in India” discusses how reservation helps promote social justice and equality for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Economically Weaker Sections. It traces the historical background of reservation from the caste system to modern constitutional provisions under Articles 15 and 16. The study uses secondary data from books, reports, and literature to analyze its social and economic impact. It explains how reservation influences employment, education, and social mobility, especially in Tamil Nadu. The paper highlights both benefits like empowerment and drawbacks like dependency and inequality. It observes that political and economic factors affect the true goals of reservation. The authors suggest periodic review and fair implementation for better results. Overall, the paper concludes that reservation remains necessary but needs reform for balanced social progress.

RESEARCH GAP:

Earlier studies have primarily examined the constitutional framework, legal evolution, and the rationale behind the reservation system in India. In contrast, my study focuses on analyzing people’s awareness and opinions regarding reservations. Many participants expressed that reservations should be determined based on economic status rather than caste. However, they were largely unaware of the existing provision for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) within the reservation policy. This indicates a considerable gap in public knowledge

about recent policy changes. Hence, my research seeks to assess the level of awareness and understanding among the population regarding EWS reservations. This approach addresses the existing gap by emphasizing public perception and awareness, rather than solely legal or constitutional aspects.

PROBLEM OF THE STUDY:

The debate around reservations has long been a point of contention in society. While intended to uplift marginalized communities, reservations are seen by some as unevenly beneficial. Higher caste individuals argue that reservations, which have been in place for over 60 years, have helped some members of the lower caste improve their lives, while others remain in the same conditions. This has led to calls for a re-evaluation of the system. Many from the higher castes feel that the reservation policy should either come to an end or be shifted to an economic basis, where support is given based on financial need rather than caste. The concern is that prolonged implementation of caste-based reservations may create further divisions, with individuals from certain communities benefiting disproportionately. Those who oppose these arguments believe that the caste system's historical injustices require continued intervention until true equality is achieved. The challenge lies in balancing these perspectives, ensuring that the system remains fair and effective.

OBJECTIVE:

1. To analyse the significance and role of reservation in addressing social inequalities.
2. To analyse why higher caste people, say that reservations should be based on economic criteria.
3. To analyse people's perspectives on reservations.

METHODOLOGY:

The research is based on non-doctrinal research. Simply non-doctrinal research means relying solely on observation and experiment, not on theory. Non-doctrinal legal research is also termed as an empirical search. In other words, non-doctrinal legal research is defined as research into the relationship between law with other behavioral sciences. and the research gives input from the public to reach well-informed decisions, resulting in mature and right public opinion. And there are many methods for non-doctrinal research. In this research method is based on the questionnaire method. Where the questions have been made and collect information on research data from the public. In which the research has been relayed upon, and the decisions have been made. the instruments include either written or oral questions and comprise an interview – style format.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:
Table:1
Social Economic Profile

S.NO	Particulars	Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	14	23.3
		Female	46	76.7
		Total	60	100
2.	Age	Under 18	4	6.7
		19 to 30	43	71.7
		31 to 50	9	15
		Above 50	4	6.7
		Total	60	100
3.	Educational Qualification	SSLC	3	5
		HSC	5	8.3
		Degree holder	50	83.3
		School student	2	3.3
		Total	60	100

Source: Primary Data

According to gender the majority of respondents are female, making up 76.7% (46 individuals). Males account for 23.3% (14 individuals). Indicating a significant gender imbalance, with far fewer male respondents compared to females. According to age, most respondents fall into the 19 to 30 age group, comprising 71.7% (43 individuals), suggesting that the majority of the participants are young adults. 15% (9 individuals) are aged between 31 and 50, representing a sizable portion of middle-aged respondents. Only 6.7% (4 individuals) are under 18, and the same manner 6.7% (4 individuals) is above 50, showing minimal participation from these age groups. According to Education qualification, over majority of the respondents (83.3%, or 50 individuals) hold a degree, indicating a well-educated sample. 8.3% (5 individuals) have completed their higher secondary certificate (HSC), while 5% (3 individuals) have an SSLC (secondary school leaving certificate) a small proportion of respondents (3.3%, or 2 individuals) are school students, which indicates that the group has some younger, less educated participants

Table:2

Social Aspects

S.NO	Statement	Yes		Maybe		No		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	You are aware of what a reservation is.	46	76.7	6	10	8	13.3	60	100
2.	Reservation is necessary.	35	58.3	14	23.3	11	18.3	60	100
3.	Reservation is important in education.	37	61.7	12	20	11	18.3	60	100
4.	Having a reservation benefits someone.	39	65	13	21.7	8	13.3	60	100

5.	If the Govt cancels reservation, one would not feel good about it.	18	30	10	16.7	32	53.3	60	100
6.	Reservation should be based on economic criteria.	37	61.7	15	25	8	13.3	60	100
7.	Reservation is affecting some people	22	36.7	28	46.7	10	16.7	60	100
8.	There is conflict that arises against reservation	31	51.7	17	28.3	12	20	60	100
9.	Reservation has affected education	22	36.7	16	26.7	22	36.7	60	100
10.	There is a certain percent of reservation	27	45	15	25	18	30	60	100
11.	I'm familiar with EWS reservation	39	65	12	20	9	15	60	100

Sources: primary data

In this table, it is reflected that 76.7% of respondents are aware of what a reservation is, while 13.3% are not aware of it. About 58.3% stated that a reservation is necessary, whereas 18.3% said it is not necessary. Furthermore, 61.7% of respondents believe that reservation is important in education, while 18.3% said it is not important in the field of education. Around 65% of respondents accepted that reservation benefits certain people, while 13.3% did not accept this fact. If the government were to cancel reservations, 53.3% of people would not be happy with that decision; 16.7% of people would not be sure about it, whereas 30% would be

happy about it. Additionally, 61.7% of respondents felt that reservations should be based on economic criteria, while 13.3% opposed this idea. About 36.7% said that reservation affects some people, and 46.7% expressed uncertainty by saying “maybe.” Around 51.7% are aware of the conflicts that arise due to reservations. Similarly, 36.7% said that reservation affects education, and another 36.7% said it does not affect education. Only 45% of respondents are aware of the percentage of reservations, while 65% are familiar with the EWS (Economically Weaker Sections) category, and 15% are not aware of it.

Table 3

Social Determination

S.No	Statement	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	The reservation satisfies everyone's needs.	3	5	9	15	23	38.3	17	28.3	8	13.3	60	100
2.	It is good to divide reservations based on the caste.	7	11.7	14	23.3	17	28.3	5	8.3	17	28.3	60	100
3.	Many people have improved their lifestyle after receiving a reservation.	19	31.7	16	26.7	19	31.7	4	6.7	2	3.3	60	100
4.	Reservation will be needed for future generations.	12	20	19	31.7	13	21.7	11	18.3	5	8.3	60	100

5.	Reservation is not considered important.	7	11.7	11	18.3	13	21.7	19	31.7	10	16.7	60	100
6.	I support reservations.	13	21.7	16	26.7	21	35	3	5	7	11.7	60	100
7.	I am aware that caste reservation exists not only in Tamil Nadu but throughout India.	10	16.7	23	38.3	21	35	4	6.7	2	3.3	60	100
8.	I believe that reservation helps in reduce social inequality.	9	15	32	53.3	7	11.7	6	10	6	10	60	100

Source: primary data

The results of the survey show varied opinions among respondents regarding the reservation system. Only a small proportion (5% strongly agree and 15% agree) believe that the reservation system satisfies everyone, while a large number (38%) remained neutral, and 41% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This indicates that most respondents feel the system does not meet everyone's expectations. Regarding the division of the reservation based on caste, only 35% agreed that it is good, whereas a majority (36.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting that most people oppose caste-based reservation and prefer it to be based on other factors, such as economic criteria. On the other hand, half of the respondents (31.7% strongly agree and 26.7% agree) felt that reservation has improved people's lifestyles, indicating a positive view of its role in uplifting disadvantaged groups. When asked whether reservations will be needed for future generations, 31.7% agreed, 21.7% were neutral, and 18.3% disagreed, showing mixed opinions about its continuation. Similarly, some respondents 30% disagreed that reservation is not important, proving that somebody still considers it an essential part of social justice. About 48.4% expressed support for the reservation system, while a significant 35% remained neutral, indicating that although many recognize its importance, others are uncertain about its present form.

Awareness about caste reservation across India was divided, with 167% showing strongly agree, 3.3% strongly disagree, and 35% neutrality, suggesting limited understanding of the reservation system at the national level. Most respondents (53.3%) believed that reservation helps to reduce social inequality, whereas

only 10% disagree; 10% strongly disagree reflecting the perception that reservation contributes to promoting equality. Overall, the findings reveal that while many respondents acknowledge the necessity and benefits of reservation, there is also considerable doubt and division about how it is implemented and its long-term relevance.

FINDINGS:

- The present study shows that the majority of respondents believe that reservations should be based on economic criteria(61.7%).
- The study shows that reservation helps reduce social inequality (53.3%), though 10% disagree, highlighting partial consensus on its role in promoting equality.
- Many respondents remained agreeing about whether the reservation system has improved anyone's lifestyle (31.7%), suggesting that people are clear about its actual impact on real life.

LIMITATIONLIMITATION:

The study's limitation lies in its focus on a specific demographic, the Chennai community, which may not represent broader societal views on reservation. Additionally, the research relies on subjective perceptions of satisfaction, which can vary widely and may not accurately reflect the overall effectiveness or understanding of reservation policies. There is also a lack of in-depth analysis on the reasons behind differing levels of satisfaction among respondents.

CONCLUSION:

The study reveals that the awareness and perception of the reservation system vary among respondents based on gender, age, and education. Most participants are young, educated individuals who show mixed opinions about the present reservation policies. While many respondents recognize the importance of reservation in promoting equality and supporting Disadvantaged groups, on the other hand, express concerns about its fairness and long-term necessity. Some believe that reservation should be extended beyond specific regions like Tamil Nadu to ensure national inclusivity. The findings also indicate that not everyone feels satisfied with the current system, and a portion of people remain uncertain about whether it has truly improved social or economic conditions. Overall, the study highlights a need for better awareness, periodic policy review, and a more balanced approach that considers both caste and economic factors to achieve true social equality.

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