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Progressing Toward Inclusivity: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Legacy in Upholding Social Justice on India's Development Path by 2047

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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Abstract

The historical roots of caste-based discrimination in India have deepened societal divisions, perpetuating untouchability, and entrenched prejudices among various caste groups. Originally a fluid social arrangement allowing mobility across strata, the caste system evolved into a rigid structure where one's caste, predetermined at birth, dictated societal roles and opportunities, including marriage, religious rites, and career paths. The hierarchy imposed limitations, relegating certain castes, such as the Shudras, to a lifetime of menial tasks despite individual capabilities. The introduction of reservation policies aimed to ameliorate historical injustices by providing opportunities to previously marginalized groups. However, while these policies facilitated the upward mobility of disadvantaged individuals, they also generated challenges for unreserved segments by limiting access to educational and employment opportunities. Contrasting the ideals of atheism and economic equality championed by Marxism, Leninism, and

Maoism, the caste system, often considered archaic even by conservative views, traces its roots back to the Vedic varna notion. Proponents of the varna system have faced criticism for perpetuating double standards in the country's leadership, prompting debates around its origins and interpretations, notably differing from the varna system outlined by Bhagwan Shree Krishna. This article delves into the basic idea of reservations as positive discrimination proposed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and puts it to stress test with the current societal makeup and the demographics of India. India got independence long back in 1947 and the reservation policy being carried on year together without being changed with the changing times. The reservation provided currently does uplift the marginalized or has it become a tool to only garner their votes? The article proposes that reservation is the still the need of the hour but with few positive changes the policy can be saved from dying a premature death, rather live long to see a developed India @2047.

Key Words

Dr. Ambedkar, Reservation, Social Justice, Inclusivity, India @ 2047.

Introduction

As the globe becomes more interconnected, it becomes easier for businesses to expand their operations and influence beyond national boundaries. Trade is the exchange of commodities and people between nations. Even while the word “globalisation” is most often used in the context of economics, it is not restricted to this field alone; social and cultural integration is a key part of globalisation that may be overlooked due to the term’s predominant economic meaning and influence.

There was a huge amount of discrimination that used to happen, people who belonged to the lower strata of the society, were denied very basic human rights. Practices such as untouchability and caste-based discrimination were at their peak. Discrimination faced by these people indicates the atrocities and oppression these marginalized people had to face, by those people who consider themselves to be of higher caste.

So, in order to bring about equality in the society, the constitution makers decided to introduce the concept of affirmative action by the state. This provided opportunities for education and employment to people who belonged to the socially, economically, and the politically backward section of society.

Caste and class have been a wildfire in discussion throughout Indian history. Historians stated that its introduction was around 2500 BCE, after the establishment of the Vedic society.

Originally the varna system which was the predecessor of the caste system, which was a reflection of one’s choices of occupation, which directly decided the class and social status of an individual.

It was a system where individuals and clans floated from one caste status to another. This varna system was composed of four pillars namely, Brahmins: Teaching professionals, Kshatriyas: Mighty kings and warriors, Vaishyas: The Merchant and businessmen, Shudras: The Working section.

With time, this system evolved into a rigid caste system, where birth decided the caste and was constant for a lifetime, unlike the originally propounded system. Now caste became a synonym of class, as it decided occupation one practised and the social status one enjoyed. Marriage was restricted to be inside caste boundaries. From religious rituals, to marriage, to profession, to life all became fixed by caste.

No matter how great fighter one maybe, but being born into a shudra caste, forced individuals to do petty odd jobs for the whole lifetime. Over the advent of intercontinental travel since the 18th century and introduction of internet and air travel, with massive and bloody wars being fought and due to rising competition for economic development and with the spread of the idea of socialism and equality, the caste system in India and around the world along with other discriminatory practises such as racism have received major setbacks and criticisms.²

While occupation and status were decided by the varna previously, today people enjoy freedom of work, breaking all the caste barriers.

Historically, the caste model promoted and emphasised on primary sectors and created huge labour force in the form of shudras. Today it is impossible to be an economic giant without a mammoth industrial complex which requires educated workforce.³

Globalisation brought the transfer of ideas across seas and from blindly following single system, a political and ideological spectrum developed, which resulted in people questioning previous systems and demanded equality of opportunity in capitalist and equality of the outcome in socialist setup⁴.

It became possible for a shudra to be an industrialist and earn more than any brahmin. The development of democracy and removal of the privy purse totally ended the era of Kings and Queens and started the reign of common people. Insertion of reservation provisions upturned the idea of caste and class, it resulted in a steady growth of previously marginalised, but at the same time created a huge challenge for unreserved people, as it reduced the available seats from job and educational institutions. Lower sections gained steady

wealth, status, power and respect. All across the political spectrum, casteism has received opposition in full form

Marxist-Leninist-Maoist communism talks about atheism and socio-economic equality, rejecting the caste system whereas, even in right and far right sections, caste has been described as mediaeval as opposed to original the vedic varna concept. The supporters of the caste and varna system have always argued that, the highest double standards are being adopted in the name of casteism in the country.⁵

The varna system discussed today is in complete contrary to the actual varna system that was prescribed by Bhagwan Shree Krishna.

In the 13th Shloka of the 4th Adhyaya of Bhagwat Geeta, Shree Bhagwan said –
“C TUR-VARnYAm MAY SrstMm GUnA-KARMA-VIBH GA Ah”⁶

Which when translated to English, literally means,

“The society has been classified into four classifications which were created by me, according to people’s qualities and activities.”

From the society’s point of view, the varna system has created a divide amongst people. I agree, yes, it has because the propagators of the varna system had their own selfish interest.

It was the intoxication of power and authority that the so-called upper caste people, to establish themselves, divided the society, but the consequences of such practices had to be borne by the country, and will also be borne by the next generation of the country.

The varna system which was in practice in real life was way different from actual. The people who wanted to suppress and had muscle and influential power, created many more varnas, in the contrary to what was actually said like: Chandala (Obnoxious people), Avarna (Without varna), Panchama (5th varna), Dasa (Slaves) and many more to establish their control and rule over people by following divide and rule policy

The Vedas, Puranas and the Upanishads, never mentioned that anyone was above anyone, no varna was ever mentioned to be superior than the other, it is the people who created differences to rule over one another.

Rather, Shree Bhagwan, while talking to Arjuna mentioned in the 32nd shloka of the 6th Adhyaya, that:
“ÂTMAUPAMYENA SARVATRA SAMAm PASHYATI YO ’RJUNA
SUKHAM Vm YADI VÂ DUhKHAM SA YOGÎ PARAMO MATAh”⁷

Which when translated to English, literally means:

“O Arjun, I regard them to be perfect yogis who see the true equality of all living beings and respond to the joys and sorrows of others as if they were their own”

So, the Vedic principle were never made to create a divide in the society, rather were made to allow the smooth functioning of the society. But as it is said, Change is constant, and with an increase in the people’s intellect the start questioning and start analysing and critiquing the older traditions, so happened with the varna system.

What role did reservation and play in the development of the backward class people?

Reservation policies in India were implemented with the aim of addressing the historical injustices perpetuated by the caste system.⁸ The rationale behind these policies lies in the acknowledgment of centuries of discrimination and oppression faced by certain caste groups, particularly Dalits (formerly known as “Untouchables”) and other marginalized communities. By reserving a percentage of seats in educational institutions, Government jobs, and legislative bodies for these groups, the intention was to provide them with

opportunities for social mobility and access to resources that were previously denied to them based on their caste status⁹.

One of the key aspects of reservation policies is their effectiveness in uplifting marginalized communities. Over the years, reservation policies have enabled individuals from historically disadvantaged backgrounds to access education and employment opportunities that were once inaccessible to them.¹⁰ This has led to significant improvements in the socio-economic status of many individuals and communities, breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalization that has persisted for generations.

However, despite the positive impact of reservation policies, they also present challenges for unreserved segments of society. One major challenge is the perception of unfairness and discrimination among those who do not benefit from reservation quotas. Many individuals argue that merit should be the sole criterion for educational and employment opportunities, rather than caste-based reservations. This has led to tensions and conflicts between different caste groups, exacerbating social divisions within Indian society.

Moreover, reservation policies have also been criticized for perpetuating a culture of dependency and entitlement among beneficiaries. Some argue that reservations have created a sense of entitlement among certain groups, leading to complacency and a lack of motivation to compete on merit. Additionally, reservation policies have sometimes been misused by individuals who falsely claim to belong to marginalized communities in order to benefit from reservation quotas, further undermining the credibility and effectiveness of these policies.

While reservation policies have played a crucial role in addressing historical injustices and promoting social justice in India, they also pose challenges and limitations. It is essential for policymakers to continuously evaluate and refine these policies to ensure that they remain relevant and effective in uplifting marginalized communities while also promoting meritocracy and inclusivity in society.¹¹

The Education Sector

Reservations in the education sector have played a crucial role in increasing the accessibility of education to people in the marginalised sector. It is always said that in the field of education, affirmative action overlooks the merit students and gives preferences to those with lesser marks on the merit. But people forget that this policy is successful in mainstreaming the backward classes and the disadvantaged group of people by increasing the enrolment in the colleges.

Reservations have been able to drastically increase the number of men and women enrolling themselves in college belonging to the marginalised section of the society. A study finds that as much as 72% of Dalit women currently studying in colleges would not have been able to do so if reservations were not available to them¹².

The educational reservation policy has been structured in a way to reduce inequalities in the society by mainstreaming people from the marginalized section and has so far worked well and fulfilled the objective it was made for. There has been a significant increase in the literacy rates of the Dalits and gap between the literacy rate of upper caste and lower caste has evidently come down.

Literacy is the very basic ingredient for the development of an individual and eventually leading to the development of the nation. The educational reservation policy has been able to fulfil that in the right manner, as it was expected to be!!

The Employment Sector

The positive impact is seen by the reservations bringing quite a lot of people from the disadvantage group into employment in the public sector undertakings which led to the overall development of a country as a whole. people's income increased and thus increased the standard of living.¹³

Reservations have been successful in the educational upliftment of dalits but in terms of employment reservation is still seem to be lacking. Access to prestigious jobs is still limited to the upper caste due to the prejudices prevalent in the society reservation may provide a platform to the dalits but it may not do the work to change the mindset of the people.

The constitutional amendment, which was intended to provide reservations, was brought to mainstream the lives in the field of employment. Statistics reveal that there has been an increase in the number of adult workers, but still a large number of Dalits remain unemployed.¹⁴

The execution and the implementation of these affirmative actions have always faced resistance from the upper caste. They feel that this is partiality with them and violates equality principle. This resistance increases when the post is a far higher job, but as far as employment is concerned reservations have been successful in increasing the number of Dalits employed.

The easy accessibility of education through affirmative actions has enabled the marginalised to get higher education and this higher education helped them hone their talent and get placed in higher positions in the multinational companies.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Vision: Positive Discrimination and Social Justice

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, played a pivotal role in shaping the provisions related to reservations.¹⁵ His vision was deeply rooted in the principles of social justice and equality. Ambedkar argued vehemently for the inclusion of reservation provisions in the Constitution as a means to rectify centuries of discrimination and oppression suffered by marginalized communities, particularly the Dalits.

Drawing upon his own experiences of social exclusion and marginalization, Ambedkar viewed reservations not merely as a form of compensatory measure but as a tool for positive discrimination.¹⁶ In his parliamentary debates, Ambedkar emphasized that reservations were essential to provide opportunities for those who had been historically deprived of access to education, employment, and political representation due to the caste-based hierarchy entrenched in Indian society.

Ambedkar firmly believed that reservations were necessary to dismantle the hierarchical structure of the caste system and to empower marginalized communities to assert their rights and dignity in society. He saw reservations as a means to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and discrimination, enabling individuals from oppressed castes to rise above their circumstances and contribute meaningfully to the nation's development.

In the current societal context of India, reservations have been instrumental in advancing the cause of social justice and empowering marginalized communities. The constitutional provisions for reservations, enshrined in Articles 15(4) and 16(4), have paved the way for the implementation of affirmative action policies aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens, irrespective of their caste or social background.

Reservations have enabled individuals from historically disadvantaged communities to access education, employment, and political representation, thereby fostering their socio-economic upliftment and integration into mainstream society. By providing a level playing field for marginalized groups, reservations have helped in bridging the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged, thus promoting inclusivity and diversity in various spheres of public life.

However, reservations have also faced criticism for perpetuating caste-based identities and for allegedly compromising meritocracy. Critics argue that reservations may lead to the stigmatization of beneficiaries and create divisions within society. Additionally, there are concerns about the exclusion of certain economically disadvantaged sections from the purview of reservation benefits.

As India undergoes rapid socio-economic and demographic transformations, there is a pressing need to adapt reservation policies to meet the evolving needs of society.¹⁷ Dr. Ambedkar himself emphasized the importance of revisiting and revising reservation policies in light of changing circumstances. He envisioned reservations as a dynamic instrument that should evolve in response to emerging challenges and opportunities.¹⁸

In order to ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of reservation policies, it is essential to undertake periodic reviews and assessments of their impact. This includes reassessing reservation quotas based on demographic shifts and exploring innovative measures to address the intersectionality of caste with other forms of discrimination, such as gender and economic status.

Furthermore, there is a need for greater transparency and accountability in the implementation of reservation policies to prevent misuse and ensure that benefits reach the intended beneficiaries.¹⁹ Dr. Ambedkar's vision of reservations as a means to achieve social justice and inclusivity remains as pertinent today as it was during the framing of the Indian Constitution. By staying true to his principles and ideals, India can strive towards building a more equitable and just society for all its citizens.

Importance of Reservation Policies in Fostering Inclusivity and Social Justice in India @2047

In envisioning India's future in 2047, the importance of reservation policies cannot be overstated in fostering inclusivity and advancing social justice. These policies, rooted in the principles of affirmative action and equality, serve as a cornerstone in the nation's journey towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

1. **Addressing Historical Injustices:** Reservation policies are crucial for addressing the historical injustices perpetuated by the caste system and other forms of social discrimination. By providing opportunities to historically marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and other oppressed castes, reservations seek to rectify centuries of systemic oppression and ensure that all citizens have equal access to socio-economic opportunities.
2. **Promoting Diversity and Representation:** In a diverse country like India, reservations play a vital role in promoting diversity and representation across various spheres of public life. By reserving seats in educational institutions, Government jobs, and legislative bodies for underrepresented groups, reservations ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are included in decision-making processes, leading to more inclusive policies and governance.
3. **Empowering Marginalized Communities:** Reservation policies empower marginalized communities by enabling them to break free from the cycle of poverty and exclusion. Access to education and employment opportunities through reservations not only uplifts individuals socio-economically but also empowers entire communities to assert their rights and dignity in society. This empowerment fosters a sense of self-worth and agency among marginalized groups, contributing to their overall well-being and development.
4. **Fostering Social Cohesion:** By bridging the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged, reservations foster social cohesion and solidarity. When individuals from diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed and thrive, it strengthens the social fabric of the nation and promotes a sense of belonging and unity among its citizens. Reservations help dismantle barriers of caste and class, fostering a more cohesive and harmonious society.
5. **Ensuring Sustainable Development:** Inclusive growth is essential for sustainable development, and reservation policies are integral to achieving this goal. By ensuring that all sections of society have equal access to resources and opportunities, reservations contribute to balanced economic development and social progress. Inclusive policies not only reduce inequality but also create a conducive environment for innovation, entrepreneurship, and prosperity for all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reservation policies are indispensable in fostering inclusivity and social justice in India @2047. As the nation continues its journey towards progress and development, it is imperative to uphold the principles of equity and fairness enshrined in these policies. By embracing diversity, empowering marginalized communities, and promoting inclusive growth, India can realize its vision of becoming a more just, inclusive, and prosperous society by 2047 and beyond.

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