



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the need and challenges of sub-categorisation of OBCs in India. How will it affect the existing reservation policy and the social justice agenda?

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Approach

- Define OBCs and sub-categorisation. Mention the constitutional provisions and the commission for sub-categorisation of OBCs.
- Discuss the need and challenges of sub-categorisation of OBCs in India. Explain how it will affect the existing reservation policy and the social justice agenda.
- Summarize the main points and give your opinion or suggestions.

Introduction

OBCs are disadvantaged castes in India, comprising 52% of the population according to the Mandal Commission (1980). However, uneven socio-economic status has led to unequal reservation benefits. To address this, Article 340 of the Constitution allows the President to appoint a commission. In 2017, a five-member commission led by Justice (Retd.) G Rohini was formed to examine sub-categorization of OBCs for equitable representation.

Body

The need for sub-categorisation of OBCs arises from the following reasons:

- To address the intra-group inequalities and horizontal imbalances among OBCs. According to a 2018 data analysis, 24.95% of jobs and seats under OBC quota have gone to just 10 OBC communities, while 983 OBC communities (37% of the total) had zero representation.
- To ensure that the benefits of reservation reach the most backward and marginalized sections of OBCs, such as de-notified tribes, nomadic tribes, etc.
- To rationalize and streamline the Central List of OBCs by removing any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors.

The challenges for sub-categorisation of OBCs are as follows:

- The lack of reliable and updated data on the population and socio-economic status of various OBC communities. The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data are not considered reliable by the commission, which has requested an all-India survey.
 - The Census 2021 is also expected to collect data on OBCs, but there have been no further announcements on that.
- The political and social implications of sub-categorisation of OBCs. Sub-categorisation may create divisions and conflicts among different OBC communities over their share of reservation.
- It may also be used as a tool to appease or alienate certain vote-banks by the ruling or opposition parties.

The impact of sub-categorisation of OBCs on the existing reservation policy and the social

justice agenda:

- On one hand, sub-categorisation may enhance the social justice agenda by ensuring that the most backward and deprived sections of OBCs get adequate representation and opportunities in jobs and education.
 - It may also reduce the resentment and agitation among some upper castes who feel that reservation benefits are cornered by a few dominant OBC communities.
- On the other hand, sub-categorisation may dilute the existing reservation policy by creating further fragmentation and hierarchy among OBCs.
 - It may also undermine the principle of proportional representation by reducing the share of some larger or more populous OBC communities.
 - It may also divert attention from the structural issues and systemic discrimination faced by OBCs as a whole.

Conclusion

Sub-categorisation of OBCs is a complex and contentious issue that requires a balanced and holistic approach. While it may address some aspects of intra-group inequalities among OBCs, it may also create new challenges and problems for the reservation policy and the social justice agenda. Therefore, it is important to have a comprehensive and credible database, a clear and consistent legal framework, and a broad-based and inclusive consultation process before implementing any sub-categorisation scheme.

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