

UNDERSTANDING MEDIA; AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF RESERVATION POLICIES ON BACKWARD CLASS EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Education is the basic to the quality of life. Reservation Policy has been guaranties in raising social status especially for Scheduled Castes and as well as other Backwards. One of the most criticized topics on the reservation policy is that it takes the edge off against the approval of merit. There is no doubt on the massive demand of higher education in a country like India. On the contrary, quality education is not accessible to all as it is extremely under-provided. Consequently, there is stern rationing in admission for seats, particularly in the top institutions. The issue therefore is not only on reservation, but also on how reservation does work.

This study is about, how media identifying the problems regarding with communal reservation policies and how it helps for the awareness, influence and as well as it discussed about the handling such issues by media. It also aimed at to know the key role of media as a source and its impact. The conflict over reservations in India is not simply a conflict about the reservation policy meant for higher education itself. There are of course. strong media debates are already conducted over whether such a policy should exist?, what are the criteria should be, and how exactly it should be implemented, and also how media analyzed the incidents regarding with the reservation policies etc. this was a purely content analysis study on the news items and debates regarding with communal reservation policies.

The study raised the findings like, media are somewhat biased and simultaneously it handles the issues, it lead to be discussed by the common people and the government. Such media contents helped the people to be aware about the issues in reservation policies. The study also raised some

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arguments about the need of reservation policies even in this time, also it discussed about, how it worked and how it would be work in future.

Key words: Reservation policy, Reservations in Higher Education, Reservations undermine Merit, Creamy Layer, Minimal effect theory and Media literacy

Introduction

The idea of caste based reservation system has envisioned by William Hunter and Jyotirao Phule in various forms in 1882 and implemented by Chatrapati Sahuji in 1901. The term has changed to "Depressed Class" in 1932 by Ambedkar and later to "Scheduled Caste/Tribes" during the framing of the constitution in 1950. The idea was that vast majorities of the poor were from a very small caste group and they needed a social net so that they could be accommodating into society as fully-fledged members. It is important to note that this part of the reservation was for electoral rights first (to guarantee political representation Poona Act '35) and a education/job rights issue second. Also, note that education has made free in these early attempts so that poverty does not hinder their education by these early efforts. If not for Dr. Ambedkar's efforts, even this would not have come through during Independence. Ambedkar remains an icon for minority causes even today and has revered because of this. There are three main objectives for Reservation. Which are,

- Uplift lower strata of society
- Ensure proper political representation of minority groups
- Ensure that minorities are not discriminated in job selections and promotion

Why Reservations in Higher Education are required

We know that there are n numbers of debates are going on against the cast based reservations in higher education. However, there must be some logic to reservations except vote bank politics. Here is my attempt was, base on the news items, I am trying to answer a few debatable arguments like, why reservation is needed in the education sector, and how mainstream media handing communal reservation issues?

Majority of the researchers and studies are identified that, reservations based on caste was easy when it comparing to any other forms, but the other forms of affirmative action ware way too

expensive and would require too many formalities, and these other forms of affirmative action come with their own intrinsic drawbacks. Especially As for reservations based on economic status; there are many problems, which have reported by the media.

The online news portal Goa News¹ discussed about the successful implementation in the state of UP and this news explains the challenges of a reservation policy based on economic status that, the government will have to come up with that very important annual or monthly income. Many of the downtrodden are daily wage earners. This means. They have no regular annual, monthly or even weekly income .So deciding upon annual or monthly income itself is a difficult task, which requires considerable beforehand study.

‘The wire’² online portal discussed another issue that arises out of this particular situation is that not many of the down trodden will be able to complete the formalities and acquire the documents to prove their disadvantaged economic status. Very few in India’s vast hinterlands have the knowhow to complete complex government forms, especially those relating to incomes and expenditure. Such a predicament would be an open invitation to touts and other unscrupulous elements, opening avenues for them to swoop in and take money from already poor families, just to make sure they qualify as economically backward.

Above two debates have been showing that slightly increased monetary resources do not guarantee the stop of discriminatory behavior against a backward caste individual. This is especially true for scheduled castes. The maladies affecting our society have their roots in hundreds of years of constant discrimination and denial of resources, and these could not tackle so easily. Therefore, in this case also, the Government of India will have to decide that income after which discrimination stops.

The fallacies of ‘Reservations undermine Merit’

Under this title here, I am providing some debates on reservation under merit basis. The following arguments were taken from the television debate conducted by the Media One channel in their programme named Kerala Summit³

The main arguments of the Mis.Bindu Krishna (president- kerala mahila congress) was the reservations policy were cuts down merit and propagates mediocrity, as it passes over those who have scored higher in an examination, for the reserved category who have scored lower.³

The problem here is that the anti reservationists mistakenly equate the number of marks scored, to the level of merit. Simply put the examination system prevalent in our country in no way

measures merit. It is only a screening tool, which has used since it would be impossible to administer any other form of screening given the size of the students applying. Moreover, because of that the society and the government as being legitimate endorse it. It was also well know that entrance tests do not test intelligence or ability in the subject, but only an aptitude for a certain type of questions.

Advocate Rajashree A.K (Human right activist) explained about the problems of admission and number of seats distributed in IITs and the related things like, in a group of applicants, the number of meritorious can never be predetermined or pre-decided. But in all institutions today, that is exactly what is happening. For instance, say the IITs have 14000 seats. Which means, according to the IITs, there are only 14000 students meritorious enough to occupy these seats, from the almost Three lakh who apply for the JEE. Most educators, professors, etc. agree that the top 20,000 to 30,000 will have the knowhow to suitably understand and apply what is taught in the IITs, but they can't make it, sometimes purely due to luck³.

The world's best universities like Cambridge, Oxford and Stanford strive to introduce as much diversity as possible on their campuses by actively encouraging foreign students. When anti reservationists argues that merit alone should be the criteria for admission to institutions of higher education, they meant that economic and cultural resources are not important, Upper caste students decide to enroll for 'coaching', instead relying solely on their 'merit', ability and hard work to get through the examination. Nevertheless, it cannot afford by a lower cast due to the lack of economy. The government recognizes that the backward castes have discriminated against for a long period, and consequently are not in a position to acquire resources like social and economical progress. To counter this, it provides the backward castes with positive discriminatory action. Whenever they really standing against these government measures, (calling them unfair and saying that the only resource needed to gain admission is hard to work). which means that the backward castes could not secure admission because they do not possess hard working due to the life burden an majority of them were not at all bothered about the education, which might resulted a plus to upper cast, a mere 35% (approximate) of the population upper cast, who possess this ability and 'merit'. 'Reservations undermine merit', has no factual standing at all.

Carrying 'Creamy Layer' Issue

The television Dharshana TV discussed about the Creamy layer through its programme between the lines. The discussion summarized as followed; The Creamy Layer does not deserve any form of affirmative action whatsoever. Everyone knows that they have benefitted enough from the reservations policy, and through their continued presence, are now usurping much needed seats or resources, which were originally hear marked for the backward sections of their own castes⁴.

From this statement, we can re-write the reason behind the government has continued decision to include the creamy layer in the reservations policy. It has found that social discrimination does not stop against a backward caste individual even when he or she acquires wealth and resources. That's why it is difficult for the government to come up with a rigid framework or set of rules, which identifies when a backward caste person belongs to the creamy layer of that caste. Identifying creamy layer from the rural areas is not easy. Discrimination is still out of control. The government was not solved the technical issues about creamy layer. Therefore, it is still unclear and nontransparent.

Avoiding News items regarding with reservation policy.

If television and newspaper coverage of the anti-reservation agitation was indulgent and one-sided, the lack of diversity in the newsroom is surely a major culprit. Here I am mentioning some of the news items to understand about the stand of mainstream media on dalit and other backward cast issues.

Once Siddarth Varathraj⁵ the senior journalist shared his experience on the avoiding of stories related with backward cast issues. He explained about a group of Dalit students from the University College of Medical Sciences (UCMS) was joined to protest against the agitation against them on 1999, and the so called leading news papers were never carried those stories including his news organization. Finally, he himself came forward to write story on that and he explained what happened next like, the story did not appear the next day or the day after. Nobody ever said the story was not interesting or not up to scratch but for some reason space could never found. The story finally appeared, in a cut and mutilated form, the travails of the Dalit students at UCMS not considered newsworthy enough by other newspapers or by any of the news channels.

Similarly, Siddarth Varathraj questioned about the politics of upper cast editors. Most of the forward caste editors and reporters are reflected their own personal impatience with the story of backwards. So these kinds of activities were questioned the privilege and the ethics of media.

Media against OBC reservations

The Economic and Political Weekly was mentioning about the Misjudged reports has compared reservations for Other Backward Classes to those for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They are looking at the issue all wrong.⁶

A report on the news site 'India-Spend', for instance, claimed that OBCs are cornering reservations. It further went on to suggest that they are better off than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, groups that face severe social discrimination in India.

Both these contentions are misguided. Instead of comparing OBCs to SCs and STs, the writers of the report would have done better to contrast them with the privileged Savarna castes. Together, the groups make up between 41% and 52% of the country's population. To understand why they are not cornering reservations, a look at public sector employment is enough. Despite their large numbers in the population, OBCs hold less than 15% of government jobs, according to a 2012 report of the Ministry of Personnel. The India Spend report was contextualized the extent of those provisions against the population of OBCs in those six states.

As the table makes it clear, the provision for OBC affirmative action in every state is less than their population share there. Even if the proportion of the reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs were adding together, it turns out that the total does not exceed 50%, as mandated by the Supreme Court. That leaves 50% of all jobs, and in some states more, effectively reserved for the category of "Others". 'Others' whose effective affirmative action outstrips their population share. It is these 'Others, not OBCs nor SCs nor STs, who are cornering jobs an education.

Well known economists Ashwini Deshpande and Rajesh Ramchandran in their analysis of the data generated by the National Sample Survey Organization on the social clusters of SC/STs, OBCs, and Others. The economists tell us that if the Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure for Others was Rs 100, then for SC/STs, the figure was Rs 57 and for OBCs, it was Rs 69. Put simply, if others earned Rs 100 annually, OBCs earned Rs 57 and SC/STs Rs 42. In terms of educational attainments, OBCs are closer to SC/STs than to others: the gap, in years,

between OBCs and Others is 2.21, whereas that between OBCs and SC/STs is 1.47. In urban areas, which often celebrated as equalising spaces, these differentials are even starker⁷.

An editorial in the Economic Times compared the distribution of households of these three categories across income levels. They divided the population into 10 income classes, each with 10% of the households. Less than 5% of Dalits and 7-8% of OBCs were represented in the top deciles of households (against the norm of 10%, assuming that inequality, were it to exist, would be randomly distributed across categories). On the other hand, over 15% of others were in the top decile. The Economic and Political Weekly report could have argued that select classes of select communities among OBCs have cornered affirmative action quotas⁸.

Analysis and conclusion

Media have a certain role in the society; Since the 1950s we have rejected the idea that the media have immediate, direct, and powerful influence on their audiences. that observations are revised, now everyone knows the view that the impact of any message on any specific person may be minimal, but consistent, persistent, and corroborated (between media) messages result in minor changes among audiences that gradually add up over time to produce significant changes in society or culture.(Minimal effect theory)

On this theoretical perspective, we can understand that the media have certain role in creating and propagating issues to support the people on identifying the proper method of implementation and analysis of the problems and positives of the cast based reservation policies in higher education and in other education sectors. Media was a power full tool; people will easily gratify the things through it than any others. Therefore, once media cover an issue, then definitely it will make a huge impact on the society. Similarly, in this study media discussed several aspects of the reservation policies and other forms. It might helped the people to analyses and understand themselves about the positives and the negative sides of the reservation policy. In addition, such healthy discussions through media helped to take indicial actions and modification on the implementation method. In this study, it is very much clear that media discussed all the aspects of the reservation policies and they sort out the problems and scopes.

Conclusion

The study reached in the conclusion that, media are somewhat biased and simultaneously it handles the issues, it lead to be discussed by the common people and the government. Such media contents helped the people to be aware about the issues in reservation policies. The study also raised some arguments about the need of reservation policies even in this time; also it gave a clear cut idea about, how media coverage on reservation policy worked and how it would be work in future. Those finding emerged from the media debates and discussions helps to identify to the government and also to the public to make sure they are not a victim of the reservation policy. Media literacy on these issues will be leads the public to ensure their right. Media literacy over reservation policy is helpful for the government to study and make sufficient implementation for successful execution.

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