



30 Years of Mandal Commission

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This article is based on **“The Mandal Moment”** which was published in The Hindustan Times on 07/08/2020. It talks about the historical background and aftermath of the implementation of Mandal commission recommendations.

Thirty years ago, on August 7, 1990, the then prime minister V.P. Singh made a historic decision that changed Indian politics and way of ensuring social justice. The then government decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, and open up reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs

He announced that OBCs would get 27% reservation in jobs in central government services and public sector units. This was perhaps the world largest affirmative action programme.

The decision changed the narrative of Caste that had been the basis of unbridled torture and ostracisation into the instrument of social justice. However, it also opened up a Pandora’s Box, leading to widespread opposition and vote bank politics.

Historical Background of OBC Reservation

- **Establishing First Backward Class Commission:** In January 1953, the JL Nehru government had set up the **First Backward Class Commission** under the chairmanship of social reformer **Kaka Kalelkar**.
 - The commission submitted its report in March 1955, listing 2,399 backward castes or communities, with 837 of them classified as ‘most backwards’.
 - However, the report was never implemented.
- **Establishing Second Backward Class Commission:** On January 1, 1979, the Morarji Desai government chose Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal, a former chief minister of Bihar, to head the Second Backward Class Commission.
 - Mandal submitted his report two years later, on December 31, 1980.
 - However, by then, the Morarji Desai government had fallen and Indira Gandhi came to power and the issue remained in the deep freeze for about a decade.

- **Implementation of Mandal Commission:** In 1990, the then Prime Minister V P Singh announced in the Parliament that the recommendations of the Mandal Commission would be implemented.
The announcement witnessed violent protests all over India, especially in northern and western India, and many students immolated themselves in protest and a few of them died as well.
- **Indira Sawhney Case:** Following the severe opposition the issue of OBC reservation reached the Supreme Court in 1992. This case is known as '**Indira Sawhney Judgment**' or Mandal Case.
 - The Supreme Court upheld the 27% reservation for OBCs but also stated that the only caste was not an indicator of social and educational backwardness.
 - Also, to ensure that benefits of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission percolated down to the most backward communities, the creamy layer criteria was invoked.

Aftermath of Mandal Commission

- **Opposition to Mandal Commission:** It faced mainly opposition on two grounds, that reservation would compromise the merit and can the reservation be given on economic lines.
However, it revolves around vote-bank politics which defeats the original purpose of reservation policy.
- **Defeating the Intended Goal of Reservation Policy:** In order to fulfil populists demands, political parties continued to expand reservation to the extent that communities who are well-off, avail reservation quotas.
This has undermined the entire purpose of reservation, envisaged as a tool to address historic injustice, and made it an exercise in power distribution and employment generation.
- **Unequal Benefits and Creation of Political Divide:** According to the **Rohini Commission**, out of almost 6,000 castes and communities in the OBCs, only 40 such communities had gotten 50% of reservation benefits for admission in central educational institutions and recruitment to the civil services.
This has led to a political divide and demands for sub-categorisation, a process currently underway.
- **Cause of Social Disharmony:** The policy of reservation has caused the resentment of those communities which did not have a share in the reservation.

Way Forward

In pursuit of social justice, the Mandal Commission recommendations were implemented. However, only half of the recommendations of the commission were implemented. The commission held that reservations along all financial assistance will remain mere

palliatives unless the problem of backwardness is tackled at its root. Thus, it recommended land redistribution and change in relations of production.

- **Making Agriculture Economically Viable:** As the small landholders, tenants, agricultural labour, impoverished village artisans, unskilled workers, forms the bulk of the OBCs community. Therefore, it is imperative to make agriculture (the backbone of the rural economy) economically viable.
- **Reviving Private Investment to Lessen Demand for Reservation:** There is a need to revive private sector manufacturing. This will attract youth towards lucrative employment avenues in the private sector and hence, there will be less demand for jobs in the public sector and reservation.
- **Review of Reservation Policy:** Reservation has remained a powerful tool of affirmative action. However, after nearly 75 years of independence, India's socio-economic polity has transformed.

Therefore, strong political will is required to review the reservation policy and establish an egalitarian society.

Conclusion

Implementation of Mandal commission recommendations empowered communities. But the current architecture of reservations needs a review, with the aim of creating a just, inclusive and equal society, without pandering to populist movements.

Drishti Mains Question

“The policy of reservation is the best way to achieve social justice in Indian society”. Critically discuss.



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This editorial is based on “**Cartographic challenge**” which was published in The Hindu on August 7th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.