



HAS THE RESERVATION POLICY BEEN ABLE TO BRING ABOUT DEVELOPMENT OF THE DALITS?

Tejas.K

Student, III Year B.A. LL.B.(Hons.), National Law School of India University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

Introduction

India is considered to be socially stratified with its peculiar form of caste due to which there has been a division among human beings into lower and upper castes. Dalits are one such group who are regarded as the lower castes and untouchables in India.¹ It is not a new word and is a Hindi translation of the word “depressed classes”.² In the recent times it had been used to refer to the scheduled class. The SCs have been in the bottom of the caste hierarchy and face the most discrimination and social exclusion.³ The caste system has and still exists within all religions with its variations of subordination.⁴

The Constitution of India has enshrined the idea of discrimination to help the backward classes which was to make a reservation policy.⁵ The provisions necessary for making a reservation policy in favor of the backward classes have been found in the Constitution itself.⁶ Scheduled castes being the main victim of discrimination and untouchability, the reservation system for them has aimed at boosting the opportunities for them in order to improve their position in the society.⁷ Dalits have been historically discriminated and have been denied access to public space or to integrate with the rest of the society. The reservation system has existed for them to improve their representation and to welfare who have been otherwise socially and economically depressed. However, it is essential to note that reservation policy is confined to government and public sectors of the government and educational institutions.⁸

The objective of reservation has been to develop the dalits. Development is a difficult term to be defined with a fixed set of parameters. However, some of the important ones like education, employment and poverty have been considered in the essay to measure development. The essay is a study of development of the dalits. The word “Dalit” and Scheduled caste have been used interchangeably in the essay. The aim of this essay is to study whether the dalits have been able to develop due to the reservation policy, which is also the research question. The broad theme of the essay is Dalits, Poverty and Development. The essay has been written with the objective of examining education, employment and poverty as the factors leading to development. The essay has relied upon statistics under to examine their improvement over time. The scope of this essay is limited to analyzing the impact of reservation on education, employment and poverty. There have been differing opinions of development and thus it is possible that the researcher has not been able to cover every parameter related to development. The essay is analytical in terms of analyzing the impact of reservation on dalits.

Impact of the Reservation Policy on Education

The reservation policy has had an important role to play in improving the access of Dalits to education and employment. Education is a field where an argument often made against reservation policy is that it grants preferential admission to one student and disregard the other who is meritorious and deserved to get it. A study published in the American Economic Review clearly dismisses the common belief that the reservation policy places the beneficiaries in academics for which they may not be ready.⁹ An important finding of the study is that the reservation policy has been able to increase the college enrollment rates of the backward classes or the disadvantaged groups i.e. the dalits. Often, there is debate about whether affirmative action is working in the way it was intended to work. The study finds it to be working the way it was intended.

¹ S.M. Michael, UNTOUCHABLE: DALITS IN MODERN INDIA, 12 (1999).

² *Id.*

³ Surendrakumar Bagde *et al*, *Does Affirmative Action Work? Caste, Gender, College Quality, and Academic Success in India*, 106(6) AMERICAN ECONOMIC REVIEW 1495, 1502 (2016).

⁴ Raj Kumar, *Dalit Culture: A perspective from Below*, 50(1) SOCIAL ACTION, 16 (2000).

⁵ *Affirmative Action: Indian Reservations* (June 29, 2013), THE ECONOMIST, available at <https://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/06/affirmative-action>, (Last visited on September 1, 2017).

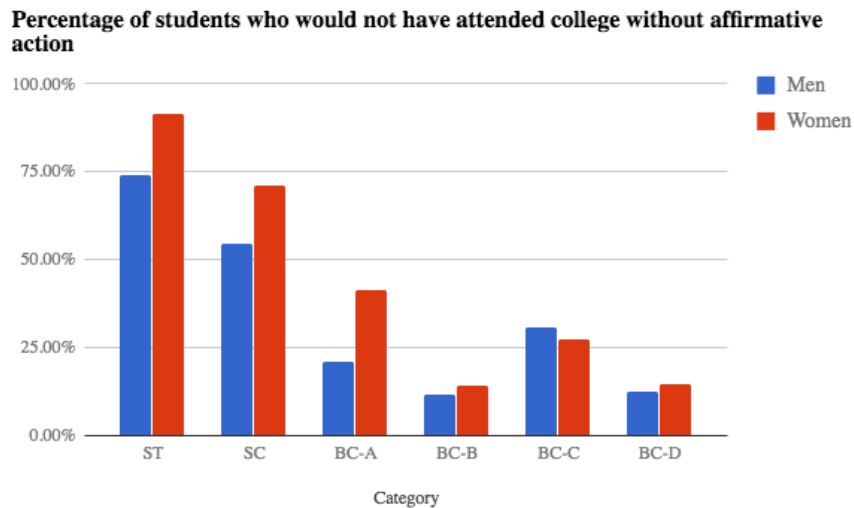
⁶ Art. 15(4), 16(4A), 16(4B), THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA, 1950.

⁷ Sunil Kumar Jangir, *Reservation Policy and Indian Constitution in India*, 13(225) AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN HUMANITIES, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES 126, 126 (2013).

⁸ *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar - Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 9, 401 (Vasant Moon ed., 1st edn., 1991).

⁹ Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1495.

The extent of the reservation quota system has been substantial in India, with 15% reservation for SCs, 6% for the STs, 7% for Backward classes A and D, and 10% for BC-B and 1% for BC-C, in most of the states.¹⁰ Major states have been considered for the study, and a major finding of the same is that affirmative action has increased the enrollment of men and women belonging to the disadvantaged groups or castes.¹¹ 72% of Dalit women who are currently enrolled for higher education would not have attended the colleges without reservation.¹² The reason for this that the reservation policy enables students to be admitted to colleges who otherwise would not have been admitted. Although admission to colleges increases due to reservation, the proportion of them attending the colleges is still smaller than their population shares.¹³



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As it can be noted in the percentage of the students who would not have attended colleges but for reservation is significantly higher among the SC and ST's. Close to 85% of women and 74% men among the STs and 51% of men and 74% of women among the SC's would not have attended college without affirmative action. ST's often reside in the inaccessible rural areas.¹⁵ In 1983, after adivasis, Dalits had the lowest educational attainment.¹⁶ The educational inequalities among the upper caste and the dalits was very evident. Looking at the percentage of STs benefitted due to the reservation policy, it is possible to say the not just the urban Dalits but even the rural dalits have been developing in education with the help of reservation. Most dalits who did not have access to education historically, have been able to fill fully the reserved number of seats in colleges for higher education.

Apart from entry to the higher education colleges, the affirmative action also helps in increasing the rank of the student in the entrance exams which is positively related to achievement of the student in terms of the grades.¹⁷ The affirmation action through reservation policy has not just gained them admissions but also incentivizes them to put more pre college effort, as it would guarantee them a better ranking, which in turn would assure them a better college. The pre-college efforts by them would be much lower in the absence of reservation. The implication of the reservation policy has been that the disadvantaged groups have been able to succeed in the colleges that they gain admissions to,¹⁸ due to the better ranks, which would essentially be a step towards development of the dalits in education.

Reservation policy in access to education has been designed to reduce the social inequalities by bringing the dalits to the mainstream, so far it has worked as intended, as it has ensured that large number of dalits get education. However the arguments against such reservations have been raised due to improved educational outcomes by the dalits which come at a cost to those who do not have reservation.¹⁹ The education gap has considerably reduced between the upper casts and the dalits in the primary level.²⁰

¹⁰ Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1502.

¹¹ Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1502.

¹² Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1502.

¹³ Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1504.

¹⁴ Samarth Bansal, *Reservation in higher education works as intended: Study*, THE HINDU (June 8, 2016), available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Reservation-in-higher-education-works-as-intended-Study/article14391741.ece>, (Last visited on September 1, 2017).

¹⁵ Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1504.

¹⁶ Sonalde Desai, and Veena Kulkarni, *Changing Educational Inequalities in India in the Context of Affirmative Action*, 45(2) DEMOGRAPHY 245, 245 (2008).

¹⁷ Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1505.

¹⁸ Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1504.

¹⁹ Surendrakumar Bagde, *supra* note 4, at 1512.

²⁰ S.Desai, and V.Kulkarni, *supra* note 17, at 246.

Impact of the Reservation Policy on Employment

Reservation has had a positive impact in bringing the Dalits into public sector employment and education,²¹ which in turn would develop them. Although the accessible share of the Dalits in Group D and Group C is close to the mark, it falls short in Group B and Group A.²² The growth of Dalits in the public services has had multiple positive effects on the social situation. Even in the elite All India Service, their shares are being fully filled.²³ The reservation policy has not been able to provide equal opportunities within each group, which has led to a situation where all the beneficiaries have not been benefitted, since there are many sub castes within a caste.²⁴ It is essential to look into the question whether in spite of policies such as reservation, the Dalits have been able to develop economically and socially.

Reservation for the Dalits in employment has been strengthened by improved enforcement, post 1990s.²⁵ While affirmative action in education is sufficient to reduce the educational inequalities, it may not be sufficient to reduce the employment inequalities. Some theorists have argued that educational certificates still exclude the depressed group from prestigious jobs.²⁶

Caste and Religious Differences in Socioeconomic Characteristics in 1999–2000^a

	Upper Caste Hindus and Others ^b	Dalit	Adivasi	Muslim	All
Urban Residence	30.6	19.4	10.7	34.6	27.2
Region					
Central	34.6	39.8	40.0	39.7	36.6
Mountain/North	1.4	1.1	0.4	3.0	1.4
North	6.6	7.6	0.7	1.9	5.8
West	16.6	10.2	21.4	10.1	15.1
South	29.2	24.6	11.9	19.9	25.8
East	9.2	15.2	16.9	19.4	12.1
North East	2.4	1.7	8.8	6.1	3.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Household Occupation					
Professional	15.4	6.0	5.7	11.5	12.4
Merchant/sales/service	11.0	8.0	3.4	15.1	10.2
Farmer	30.1	14.6	33.7	18.1	26.3
Farm labor	17.3	42.4	37.1	18.3	23.8
Other manual labor	19.6	24.2	15.0	29.9	21.2
Unemployed/retired/missing	6.6	4.9	5.1	7.2	6.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean Household Size	4.8	4.8	4.8	5.6	4.9
Mean per Capita Expenditure	731.4	495.6	453.0	600.5	648.7
Sample Size	74,687	18,113	13,326	14,183	120,309
Weighted Percentage	61.74	18.65	8.87	10.74	100.00

^aThe sample size is 120,309 households from 55th round of the NSS data.

^bOthers includes Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and other minority religious groups not classified as dalit or adivasi. 27

As it can be seen from the above table, dalits have been poorer than the upper caste and their job in the professional sector has been mere 6 % till 2000. The reservation for the dalits in employment is significant. 15% of the government jobs at all the levels are reserved for the dalits at all levels.²⁸ This is inclusive of jobs at the center, the state and even the public sector units.²⁹ The reservation in employment is substantial as the government has been the largest formal sector employer accounting for more than 66% of all the jobs in India.³⁰ About 80% of the

²¹ Sunil Kumar Jangir, *supra* note 8, at 127.

²² Sunil Kumar Jangir, *supra* note 8, at 127.

²³ Sunil Kumar Jangir, *supra* note 8, at 127.

²⁴ Sunil Kumar Jangir, *supra* note 8, at 127.

²⁵ S.Desai, and V.Kulkarni, *supra* note 17, at 246.

²⁶ S.Desai, and V.Kulkarni, *supra* note 17, at 247.

²⁷ S.Desai, and V.Kulkarni, *supra* note 17, at 247.

²⁸ S.Desai, and V.Kulkarni, *supra* note 17, at 247.

²⁹ S.Desai, and V.Kulkarni, *supra* note 17, at 248.

³⁰ S.Desai, and V.Kulkarni, *supra* note 17, at 249.

jobs in these public sectors are categorized as Group C, which consists of jobs like driver, technician, mechanic etc., and Group D which consists of jobs like peon, watchman etc.³¹ In the year 1996, about 29% of the employees in this sector were dalits.³²

In 1991, of the total rural workers, about 82% were involved in farm activities and the remaining 18% were involved in the non-farm activities.³³ Comparing this with the non-SC population, the occupational pattern of the SC was less diversified than the non-SC population.³⁴ The percentage of dalits involved in wage labour was very high compared to the non-SC population. The economic condition of the dalit workers is reflected by the unemployment rates.

To begin with, there were only 2,18,000 Dalit government employees in the year 1960, which increased by almost 2 times in the year 1991 and reached 5,40,000 in the 2003.³⁵ The percentage of dalit employees to total government employees increased by about 16 % from 1960 to 2003, which is fairly proportionate to their share in the population.³⁶ Similarly, in case of public sector undertakings, it increased from 40,000 to 2,96,000 from 1970 to 2003 and in case of nationalized banks it increased from 55,000 to 1,33,000.³⁷ Considering employees from government, public sectors and banks together they have increased from 7,88,000 to about 9,10,000,³⁸ which is approximately 13%. The above statistics show that the number of dalits have increased significantly, over the last fifty years, which has been possible only due to the reservation policy. Although the reservation is proportionate to the required percentage in the Group C and Group D, it is not up to the mark in Group A and Group B,³⁹ which indicates that despite reservation they have fallen short to fill the higher-grade and technical posts.

The amendment to the constitution, which provided for reservation for dalits,⁴⁰ was taken as a step to increase the representation of the dalits in services under the state. Despite many efforts by the government, the process of bringing dalits into mainstream in terms of employment has taken quite some time. The statistics indicate the increase in the number of dalit employees, however it has taken a long time to bring about a significant change. This might be due to the problems faced during implementation of reservations from various spheres.⁴¹ Implementation of affirmative action faces immense resistance from the other groups which are not the beneficiaries. The magnitude of resistance is higher when it comes to jobs of higher grade as compared to lower job categories.⁴² Therefore as far as employment is concerned it can definitely be said that reservation policy has been able to develop dalits in terms of employment, although not fully, but significantly.

Impact of the Reservation Policy on Income and Poverty

While discussing affirmative action in education to be an incentive for the dalits to get education, it is essential to analyze the circumstances that are preventing them from getting education, which is poverty. The income and financial situation of a family plays a crucial role in whether or not their child can afford education. Poverty has a problem, especially among the dalits and other backward classes. As it can be seen in the table above, very less percent of the dalits live in the urban residences, which is also why they may not have access to schools. However, the increase in employment and access to education has also significantly improved the poverty levels and economic situation.

Despite reservation, the ever present high population hinders the integration of Dalits with the rest of the society.⁴³ The high population also act as barriers for people finding jobs, as there is huge competition. In light of denial of education to dalits, they have not been adequately prepared to compete with the others for jobs.⁴⁴ Education, employment and poverty act as a chain, as denial of education leads lesser job opportunities for the dalits, which has the consequence of remaining unemployed and poor.

³¹ Indiastat (2006), *Group-wise Number of Employees and Representation of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in Public Sector Employment in India*, available at <https://www.indiastat.com/labourandworkforce/380987/employment/85/unemploymentsituation/281124/stats.aspx> (Last visited on September 1, 2017).

³² *Id.*

³³ Sukhadeo Thorat, *New Economic Policy and its impact on Employment and Poverty of the Scheduled Castes*, 8 (Occasional Paper Series No. 2, Department of Sociology, University of Pune, 1997).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Sukhadeo Thorat, and Chittaranjan Senapati, *Reservation in Employment, Education and Legislature – Status and Emerging Issues*, 11 (Working Paper Series No. 5, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2007).

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ Sukhadeo Thorat, and Chittaranjan Senapati, *supra* note 36, at 12.

³⁸ Sukhadeo Thorat, and Chittaranjan Senapati, *supra* note 36, at 12.

³⁹ Sukhadeo Thorat, and Chittaranjan Senapati, *supra* note 36, at 13.

⁴⁰ Art. 16(4A), THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA, 1950.

⁴¹ Sukhadeo Thorat, and Chittaranjan Senapati, *supra* note 36, at 13.

⁴² Sukhadeo Thorat, and Chittaranjan Senapati, *supra* note 36, at 14.

⁴³ Jasmine Rao, *The Caste System: Effect on Poverty in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka*, 1(2) GLOBAL MAJORITY E-JOURNAL 97, 101 (2010).

⁴⁴ *Id.*

Percentage of Persons Living Below Poverty Line (BPL) for ST/SC/OBC Population (Based on Tendulkar Methodology) in Rural and Urban Areas of India (2011-2012)										
State	Rural					Urban				
	ST	SC	OBC	Other	Total	ST	SC	OBC	Other	Total
India	45.30	31.50	22.60	15.50	25.70	24.10	21.70	15.40	8.10	13.70

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While in the year 1978, the percentage of dalits below poverty line was 56%, it reduced to 41% in the year 1988.⁴⁶ A substantial reduction happened during these 10 years, when the percentage reduced by almost 15%. As it can be seen from the table, there has been a substantial reduction in these 10 years and in 2012, it has reduced to 31.5%. Taking 1978 to 2012 for consideration there has been a significant reduction of 25%. The dalits have clearly benefitted by the affirmative action in education and employment which consequently indicates improvement in poverty levels. However, if the the percentage of rural dalits is compared to urban dalits, there is a vast difference, as the percentage of urban dalits is a mere 21%.

The statistics clearly indicate that percentage of rural dalits below poverty line has clearly reduced over the years. Thus the post reform trend in the poverty levels have shown significant improvement. The significant improvement of the dalits has been mainly due to the improvement in the non-farm employment which has driven the real wages up and caused poverty levels to decline.⁴⁷

The table shows the decrease in the poverty rates of Dalits, which can be attributed to the reservation systems.⁴⁸ Reservation has ensured more opportunities for the dalits in education and employment which has had an impact on poverty levels. Due to increased job opportunities and education, income possibilities are more which has been able to pull the dalits out of poverty.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Having looked at 3 different parameters to measure development of the dalits through reservation, it is possible to conclude that over time there has been a positive impact of reservation on them. The aggregate impact through various parameters also indicate the general economic and social development of the dalits. Their development is reflected by the indicators of human development such as employment, education, income level etc., which have been discussed above. The statistical analysis done in the essay is indicative of development of the dalits in the individual parameters. Over time there has been considerable improvement in the representation of dalits in education and government employment which has reduced poverty levels considerably.

Despite reservation, the employment of the dalits in the higher grade jobs has not gone up, and has considerably decreased.⁵⁰ Although the number of students enrolling in colleges due to reservation has considerably increased, it has not ensured them higher grade jobs in the government. The analysis has indicated that the reservation policy has helped the dalits secure jobs in government sector. Although, compared to the development of the non-dalit population, the development of dalits has been slower, but it has been possible due to the reservation policy. Development in individual parameters has been looked at in this essay, the essay has not looked at overall development based on all the parameters.

Coming back to the question of whether affirmative action in the form of reservation was the right developmental model to be adopted in India. Drawing from the findings of the essay, it is possible to conclude that so far, the policy has worked as it was intended to work i.e. to bring dalits to the mainstream and ensure integration with the society. One can conclude that the reservation policy has been able to develop the dalits. Although it may not be possible to say that it has been possible to the fullest extent, it may not be denied that they have benefitted from reservation. There was a need for such a policy to afford them more opportunities to pull themselves up.

⁴⁵ Indiastat (2012), *Percentage of Persons Living Below Poverty Line (BPL) for ST/SC/OBC Population (Based on Tendulkar Methodology) in Rural and Urban Areas of India (2011-2012)* (table) available at <https://www.indiastat.com/economy/8/incidenceofpoverty/221/stats.aspx#> (Last visited on September 1, 2017).

⁴⁶ Indiastat (1991), *Percentage of Scheduled Castes (SC) /Scheduled Tribes (ST) and All Population Below Poverty Line (BPL) as per Previous Estimates of Planning Commission in India* (table) available at <https://www.indiastat.com/economy/8/incidenceofpoverty/221/stats.aspx#> (Last visited on September 1, 2017).

⁴⁷ Sukhadeo Thorat, *supra* note 34, at 13.

⁴⁸ Sukhadeo Thorat, *supra* note 34, at 13.

⁴⁹ Jasmine Rao, *supra* note 44, at 102.

⁵⁰ Sukhadeo Thorat, *supra* note 34, at 11.

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