

Study of debate around the Maratha Reservation

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Abstract

Today India is constituted to be the one of the fastest developing countries of the world. The Transition from underdeveloped to a developing country has its own problems and limitations. The social discrimination can be seen in India. Hence, to solve the problem of this discrimination, India had made reservation policy. Still after 70 years of independence, the question of reservation to various communities for social justice and equality is making the people of to recall the debates on reservation once again. There are protests going in many states of India, demanding the reservation. Similar kind of demand of reservation by Maratha Community in Maharashtra is seen current situation. Maratha Reservation has once again given rise to debate on reservation policy of India.

Over a past few months, Maharashtra witnessed a number of agitations demanding the reservations for Maratha Community under the OBC (Other Backward Classes) quota. There is need to study the demand for reservation by Maratha community and take opinion of the both the people of the society Maratha and Non-Maratha. The Maratha community enjoyed the social status with Brahmin in the history of Maharashtra. The debate on Maratha reservation have given rise to many questions, like why this the demand of reservation come into existence after 60 years to reservation given other community, is there any political influence or the influence of the people who are against the reservation.

The research paper will try to understand history of the debate what are the basis of this demand and what are the opposing arguments made by those who are arguing against the Maratha Reservation. It will provide a clear picture of the debate going on about the Maratha reservation. It is very important in order to see, is there real need of reservation to this community or it is just a demand which is done by influencing this people by some other institution like Political institution or the Brahmanical forces, in order to gain the profits from it. The research was an exploratory research. Both primary and secondary data was collected for the study. Books, magazines and research papers, daily regional newspapers, websites, government gazettes were the main sources for the secondary data. The primary data was collected by using quantitative methods of data collection. It includes interviews of the people from Maratha Community and Non Maratha Community and those who took initiative in the movement of demand for reservation to Maratha Community in Akola City. Conclusion or say findings of research was that no proper research was done by government before giving(announcing) the reservation, the politicians were well aware of the limits that Supreme Court will put stay and there were also aware of the fact there is ceiling of 50% reservation for the State. Many commissions had already said that Maratha community doesn't come under backward caste category and it is forward caste.

Key Words - Maratha Politics, Maharashtra , Reservation, Maratha community, Social Justice

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I. Introduction

Discrimination has become a worldwide phenomenon and is practiced based on caste, race, gender, birth, class, nationality, ethnicity, etc. Certainly, these discriminatory practices have their origins in the country's traditions. To eradicate this discrimination, different countries have come up with multiple plans with different solutions and policies.

In India, for example, social discrimination is becoming more prevalent. As a result, in order to address the issue of discrimination, India implemented a reservation policy. India is a diverse country with a long history. Indian history is full of discrimination by upper castes against lower castes. A large segment of Indian society was subjected to caste discrimination; this segment, known as the lower caste, was socioeconomically and politically backward in comparison to the small segment of the upper caste. This was a poor region of India. In order to help this disadvantaged section of India, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, chairperson of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution, had some special provisions made secure "justice—social in the constitution for the betterment of this disadvantage section. The preamble of the constitution resolves to secure, "Justice, Social, Economic and Political" to all the citizens. It further pro claims as one of its aims the promotion

among them of “Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and unity of nation”. There is one more provision in Indian constitution, to bring equality and to give social status; political rights to this disadvantage section of the Indian Society, “Reservation Policy”, through this disadvantage section get the reservation in education, employment and political institution.

Professor Marc Galanter termed it as, “compensatory discrimination”, a subject which deals with Indian constitutional policies to safeguard the interests of the historically disadvantaged sections of the population. (Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India). Many people call it affirmative action or positive discrimination.

The Congress-NCP government approved 16 per cent reservation for Marathas and five per cent for Muslims in government jobs and educational institutions. With the additional 21 per cent quotas for the politically influential Maratha community and Muslims cleared by the Cabinet, reservation in jobs and educational institutions in Maharashtra will go up to 73 per cent. Reservation already exists among OBCs for a section of Marathas known as Kunbis. Maratha Kunbis, who are largely agriculturists, constitute 31.5 percent of the total Maratha population and have a large presence in Vidarbha and Konkan. (DNA Newspaper, 2014)

The Marathas, who have created a position of themselves as a warrior, agriculturist caste, have a stranglehold on Maharashtra’s political leadership and have always opposed reservations. But the declining returns from agriculture, the desire to take advantage of the services and knowledge-based sector and worried about the rise of the other backward castes on the political ladder have led the community to demand inclusion in the Other Backward Classes Category. (Vishwambhar Gaiyakwad, 2014)

There is opposition to this demand by many people as Mandal Commission and Kaka Kalelkar Commission, oppose this demand and said that Maratha Community is forward caste. (Mridul Kumar, 2009).

Maharashtra Cabinets - Social and Regional Profile, 1960-2010

In this section, we are going to discuss the politics of Maharashtra. So for this I refer to the article by Abhay Datar, Vivek Ghotale. Authors discussed the Maharashtra Cabinets – Social And regional profile from 1960 to 2010. In this article, the authors have given more focus on the how the politics of Maharashtra is dominated by Maratha community.

The Politics of Maharashtra has long been categorised by the domination of Maratha community. A few studies have tried to quantify this domination by mapping the social and caste profile of the members of the state legislative assembly.

In this section, there will be some analyses by the authors, about the composition of selected state cabinets from 1960 to argue that while Maratha dominance has remained intact, it has acquired a sharp regional profile, with power being increasingly concentrated in the hands of Maratha Political leaders from western Maharashtra.

As many scholarly studies of Maharashtra's politics have noted, two distinctive features, since the formation of the state in 1960. The first is the domination of the members of the Maratha-Kunbi caste cluster, or the Maratha community. The second is the near-complete hold over power of a single party, the congress, for nearly three decades. Maharashtra, in common with other states like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana, has seen the continuation of the control over political power by those who belong to the dominant castes of each of the states. But unlike these states where different dominant castes are politically strong in particular regions, the Marathas are spread throughout the state.(Abhay Datar,Vivek Ghotale, 2013)

Unlike most other states in India, the congress never lost power in the state till the 1990s, except briefly in the late 1970s, and then from 1995 to 1999, when the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance came to power. However, in 1999, Sharad Pawar formed the Nationalist Congress Party(NCP) and contested both the Lok Sabha and state assembly elections held that year separately. But the Congress and the NCP have been jointly ruling the state since then after having formed a post-election alliance.

According to the authors, these two features are closely interrelated. It can be argued that the second is a consequence of the first. Since 1960, these two features have been strengthened by the community's near monopoly over the cooperative sector in rural Maharashtra, especially control over the cooperative sugar factories. These cooperatives have served as a building block of the political careers of many a Maratha politician, as also those from other communities, in the state. The Maratha-Kumbis have been explained as constituting the dominant caste in Maharashtra, since they possess the characteristics of such a caste, identified by M N Srinivas.

These numerical majority over the other castes and the wielding of economic and political power. Another feature of dominant caste, observed by him is that it does not have too low a position in the local caste hierarchy. This is also the characteristic of the community. “Dominance” has been defined as “**exercise of authority in society by groups who achieved politico-economic superiority, and claimed legitimacy for**

their commands in terms of superior ritual status, or through alliances with those who controlled status distribution”.

In the precolonial period, substantial control over cultivated land and the structures of revenue collection underpinned the Maratha-Kumbi domination of social life in Maharashtra, one that it shared with the brahmins. The legacy of the non-brahmin movement, in which the Maratha-Kumbis played a significant role, also assisted in the process of the community acquiring a leading position in the politics of the state. The dominance of the Congress in Maharashtra rested on the fact that it in turn was dominated by the Maratha-Kunbi community. The members of the community first entered the congress in large numbers during the 1930s, which enabled the party to strike deeper roots in the rural areas, especially in western Maharashtra. Y B Chavan's encouragement of the cooperative sector in Maharashtra in turn strengthened the economic foundations of both the dominance of the Congress and the Maratha-Kunbis.

Quantifying Political Dominance

The significant studies of the politics of Maharashtra have always emphasized the phenomenon of the political domination of the state by Maratha-Kumbis, who have been described as a caste cluster rather than as a discrete and homogeneous caste. Indeed, the distinguished sociologist-anthropologist Irawati Karve described Marathas and the Kumbis as being “made up of numerous endogamous sub-castes”. This dominance has also been described as “Maratha Hegemony”. (Abhay Datar, Vivek Ghotale, 2013)

Studies of the electoral politics of the state have confirmed the continued political domination of the Marathas. One such study has demonstrated that every state assembly election from 1967 to 2004, the percentage of the MLAs belonging to the Maratha community has never been less than 36%. This strong position of the Marathas in the state assembly was evident in its social composition after the 2009 elections, where almost 45% of the MLAs belonging to the community (Abhay Datar, Vivek Ghotale, 2013).

In earlier times studies of the politics of Maharashtra discussed the dominance in only general terms without quantifying it in the legislative or executive level. But the exception was claim made by Baba Adhav, a leading socialist activist of the state, that while the community which constituted approximately 38% of the state's population, individuals belonging to it occupied between 75% and 80% of the positions of power in Maharashtra.

It is often noted that of the 16 individuals who have served as the chief ministers of the state, 10 belonged to the Maratha community, and in terms of region, only five hailed from western Maharashtra. One more fact that unlike the rest of the state, Maratha community does not occupy a numerically strong position in Vidarbha and hence has to share power with other communities has often overlooked.

Table 1 : Caste Profile of Cabinet Ministers in Selected Maharashtra Cabinets since 1960

Caste Group								
Maratha-Kumbi	Upper Caste	Intermediate Castes	OBCs	SCs	STs	Muslims	Others	Total
78	14	6	19	18	7	15	16	173

Source : (Abhay Datar, Vivek Ghotale, 2013, Maharashtra Cabinets - Social and Regional Profile 1960 - 2010)

A total of 16 cabinets formed in the state since 1960 have been selected for analysis of their caste and regional composition in order to quantify Maratha dominance in Maharashtra. The sample includes a total of 173 individuals, whose social profile is given in Table 1.

As Table 2 shows, barring the exception of ShivSena- BJP cabinet formed in 1995, the Marathas have constituted the largest group in the state cabinets. The upper castes no longer have a presence in the cabinet. The cabinet ministers belonging to the scheduled tribes (STs) were absent till 1980 but have increased their numbers since then.

Leading Maratha contenders for the membership of the Maharashtra cabinet had been removed from state politics by making them to contest Lok Sabha elections, held earlier that year. Thus, while the imposition of the A R Antulay as the chief minister by the congress central leadership in 1980 was a deliberate attempt to break the Maratha dominance, the community's majority in the state cabinet was kept intact, perhaps in an attempt to ensure that it did not drift away from party.

Table 2 : Caste Profile of Selected Maharashtra Cabinets (1960-2010)

Cabinets	Caste Group								
	Maratha Kumbi	Upper Caste	Inter-mediate Caste	OBCs	SCs	STs	Muslims	Others	Total
Y B Chavan 1960	6	2	1	1	1	0	1	2	14
Y B Chavan 1962	9	1	1	2	1	0	1	2	17
V P Naik 1967	10	1	1	2	1	0	1	1	17
V P Naik 1972	4	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	12
S B Chavan 1975	9	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	14
Vasantdada Patil 1977	14	1	3	2	2	0	1	0	23
Vasantdada Patil 1978 (Co)	8	1	0	3	1	0	0	1	14
Sharad Pawar 1978 (Co)	8	2	0	1	2	0	1	3	17
A R Antulay 1980	9	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	15
Vasantdada Patil 1983	6	0	1	2	2	1	1	1	14
S B Chavan 1986	5	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	8
Sharad Pawar 1990 (Co)	9	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	15
Manohar Joshi 1995 (Co)	4	5	0	6	3	1	1	2	22
Vilasrao Deshmukh 1999 (Co)	16	0	0	4	2	3	1	0	26
Vilasrao Deshmukh 2004 (Co)	13	0	1	4	2	3	2	2	27
Prithviraj Chavan 2010 (Co)	13	0	0	4	3	3	2	2	29

Source: (Abhay Datar, Vivek Ghotale, 2013, Maharashtra Cabinets - Social and Regional Profile 1960 - 2010)

Generally either the western Maharashtra or Vidarbha have provided the largest number of cabinet ministers. This is hardly surprising since western Maharashtra and Vidarbha always have occupied the first and the second position in terms of the number of MLAs in the state assembly. Interestingly, till the late 1960's, Vidarbha had higher representation than western Maharashtra in the state cabinet. This could be attributed to Chavan's concern to win over the political leadership of Vidarbha to the cause of a single unified state of Maharashtra and deflate the demand for separate state of Vidarbha, according to the authors.

From the 1990s, the distribution of key portfolios in the state cabinet has dominant position of the Maratha leadership from western Maharashtra. This can be shown by tracing the pattern of distribution of key portfolios in the state since 1960. The following 10 portfolios have been identified by the authors as being key ones since they are regarded as being politically crucial: home, finance, revenue, agriculture, public works (earlier known as building and communication), industries, irrigation, cooperatives, rural development and urban development.

Authors identified the two significant patterns, first is the clear marginalisation of non-Maratha leaders or cabinet ministers in the allocation of key portfolios. The second is the near- monopoly of the western Maharashtra over these key portfolios. In the cabinet headed by Prithviraj Chavan, seven of the ten key

portfolios are held by Maratha leaders from the region. Thus, the Maratha leadership from western Maharashtra has established an unprecedented control over political power in the state.

According to the authors, Maratha political leadership from western Maharashtra has always been underlined by the co-operatives, particularly the sugar co-operatives and agricultural credit cooperative societies and more recently converted into agro-industries. Attempts to develop and sustain cooperatives in other regions of the state have not succeeded, with Marathwada being an exception to a certain extent. Vidarbha has been the state's leading cotton growing region. This crop could have served as the basis of a strong and flourishing cooperative sector, but this could not happen.

Non-Maratha leaders, even those belonging to agrarian castes have also not been very successful in developing an economic base for themselves. "conspiracies" by Maratha leaders from western Maharashtra have often been blamed for this state of affairs. Hence the dominance of Maratha leadership from western Maharashtra is equally a consequence of their political strategies, and the relative inability of the leaders from other regions to sustain their own politics (Abhay Datar, Vivek Ghotale, 2013).

According to the authors, this relative inability might be the outcome of the different political histories of these three regions. If in western Maharashtra, the Maratha community was quick to learn modern organisational techniques primarily due to the non-brahmin movement, their counterparts in Vidarbha were slow to catch up, again mainly due to the limited spread of the same movement.

Marathwada till 1948 was under the reactionary rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad that restricted almost all forms of political activity, while the Maratha leaders had secondary position in the upper-caste dominated Congress leadership of the region. This might have had an impact on the capacities of the leadership of the region to forge ahead in politics.

It means that the backward regions of the state no longer possess leaders with adequate clout at the state level to ensure a regionally fair distribution of resources. Thus, the concentration of political power among the Maratha leaders from western Maharashtra has the potential to lead to a deepening of the existing sharp economic divide on regional lines in the state, an ominous portent indeed. (Abhay Datar, Vivek Ghotale, 2013).

In the next section, we are going to look at the over of the Maratha Politics in Maharashtra with 2014, assembly elections.

Farewell to Maratha Politics

Author Suhas Palshikar had written the article, "Farewell to Maratha Politics". In this article, he discussed the reasons for the vanishing picture of the Maratha Politics in Maharashtra. According to him, Politics in Maharashtra has long been known for the twin features of a dominant party and dominant caste. Even when Congress faced setbacks nationally, Maharashtra mostly withstood the all India trends. In 1967, the Congress was not disturbed in the state by the upheaval in north India. In 1977, it went through a crisis, but was not uprooted as it was in most of the states of the north. In 1989 too, Maharashtra did not turn anti-Congress. Thus, shocks to the dominance of the Congress were either absorbed or became moderate when they reached Maharashtra.

According to him, part of the reason why the Congress survived in Maharashtra was its long association with dominant Maratha caste. Like the Congress, Maratha dominance also survived amid many challenges and periodic upsets. The first major challenge emerged from competition among the Maratha elite. This was in 1977-78 when Maratha leaders were ostensibly divided over Indira Gandhi's leadership and whether to collaborate with Indira loyalists in the state government. The historic split effected by Sharad Pawar in 1978 took place against this background. History repeated itself in 1999, when after falling out with Sonia Gandhi, Pawar formed the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). In Maharashtra this party created yet another split in the Maratha elite who were by then quite disintegrated and engaged in a power game without any broader orientation. Before that, individual Maratha leaders experimented with the idea of operating outside the Congress fold by aligning themselves with the Shiv Sena-Bhartiya Janata Party government in 1995. (Suhas Palshikar, 2014)

Decline of Congress Continued

Both the stories of the dominant caste and dominant party require mention since they constitute the backdrop to the most recent fall of both the Congress and the Maratha elite in the assembly elections.

After the defeat in 1995, Maratha dominance had weakened and the Congress also did not manage to regain its dominant position. Suhas Palshikar says that, it can be argued that a rewriting of the script began in 1995. that the Congress and the NCP come back to power in 1999 and in two subsequent elections owed much to contingent factors and the inability of the Shiv Sena and BJP to function as effective opposition parties after 1999. The continued success of the Congress (and the NCP) can only be described as "Survival amid

decline”(Palshikar, 2014). “Congress Politics” could not go beyond an uncomfortable and thin majority, and the two Congress parties together could not register a robust vote share in the state.

For Maharashtra, these elections mean that politics in the state has finally shifted away from the dominance of the Congress. Whether the two Congress parties remained allies or turned foes was not very important in shaping their rout. Both had lost credibility among their traditional supporters; they both suffered from a trust deficit; they lacked leadership, and they were handicapped by allegations of corruption. But more than the defeat of the Congress and NCP, what marks the new era for the politics of the state is the desertion of the Maratha voters from two Congress parties. Again, as we noted, the unease among the Marathas is not new.(Suhas Palshikar,2014)

The assembly elections of 2014 signified the culmination of this process. In a sense, politics in Maharashtra has been much more resistant to changes. According to Suhas Palshikar, Aim of NCP was at replacing the Congress by occupying its space. It was qualified for this because it had stalwarts among the Maratha political elite; and being a faction of the Congress, it was in a position to win over the party's following.

Most of the Maratha elite had diversified into real estate and other urban enterprises with the potential to garner resources. While the NCP was mainly identified as a party of Maratha interests, it was neither able to serve as a platform for all the Maratha elite nor could it enthrone the larger Maratha community to support it. Soon, it became a party of only western Maharashtra. In these elections, it won 41 seats, of which 19 are from western Maharashtra where it is seen as a party of the establishment.

Equally important, many strong Maratha leaders chose to align with the BJP in the assembly elections. So, the BJP success can in part be explained by the switching of loyalties. If the BJP expands further in this region, it will have the two larger regions of the state – Vidarbha and Western Maharashtra under its influence, putting it in a comfortable position to replace the Congress.

New Social Equations

Whenever the BJP in power and has replaced the Congress, it has brought in new social equations. Since the 1990s, in Maharashtra, the BJP has consistently adopted pro-Other Backward Class (OBC) strategy. When pro-Mandal forces were making all the appropriate ideological noises, the BJP in Maharashtra presented not one but many non-Maratha and non-Brahmin leaders. They included NS Farande, Anna Dange, Pandurang Fundkar, Gopinath Munde (passed away) and Eknath Khadse, Sudhir Mungantiwar, And Vinod Tawde. Thus in most regions of the state, the party has a non-brahmin face. The voter base of the party is also becoming more diverse, and it is, in particular, cultivating a following among the various OBC sections. With its traditional base among the urban, trading, and white-collar sections, and the brahmins in particular, the party sits pretty on a social coalition of the upper castes and the OBCs. (Suhas Palshikar,2014)

This is more or less the same strategy it has adopted in many other states. This new equation of urban, upper castes and OBCs is bound to affect the social bases of politics in the state. In the near future, this could aggravate the crisis in Maratha hegemony. The elite has broadly adopted a dual strategy to handle the crisis. On the one hand, it tries to consolidate community identity and on the other hand it makes compromises for retaining local power.

Since the 2004 elections, the Maratha leadership has resorted to a militant politics of symbolism (claiming both Marathi identity and appropriating the Shivaji legacy) and to a politics of assertion by demanding that all Marathas be considered as backward. These indicate that the Maratha leadership will bank on emotive issues and consolidating a caste bloc rather than accommodating different social sections, according to Suhas Palshikar. He says that the elite in the Maratha community do not have the political skills to work away from centres of power. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine how the Marathas leadership will sustain itself outside of power- particularly when the prospects of getting it in the near future are not bright.

The second larger issue pertains to the social and political role of the Maratha elite in the scheme of things. In terms of number no party can ignore the Maratha community, which constitutes about 30% of the population in the state, the single largest group by caste/ community. Similarly, in terms of control over resources, no party can ignore the Maratha leadership. And yet, in the last 25 years, the hegemonic status of the Maratha leadership has crumbled. The deep division caused by the attention of the most Maratha leaders shifting to urban material interests was one dimension of the decline. The initial opposition to Mandal and the subsequent appropriation of the Mandal discourse to demand reservations eroded the hegemony in rural Maharashtra. (Suhas Palshikar,2014)

India: Federation of communities

Irfan Engineer had written one article in Frontier Weekly, in that he had discussed the politics of Maratha Reservation. The title of his article was “India : Federation of communities.”

According to Irfan Engineer, a petition has been filed in the High Court of Bombay to challenge the 16% reservations to the Marathas on several grounds, the main being that Marathas are not socially or educationally backward. 10 of the 17 Chief Ministers of Maharashtra have been from the Maratha community. Presently, 152 out of 288 MLAs in Maharashtra are from Maratha community which constitutes 32% of the population. They are dominant politically and socially in the rural areas, particularly controlling Sugar Cooperatives, Cooperative Banks and several professional educational institutions. This Marathi State has in fact become a Maratha State.

Reservation of appointments or posts can only be in favour backward class of citizens, who in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State as per Article 16(4) of the Constitution. Similarly, the State is not prevented from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens, SCs and STs, like, reservations of seats for admission in educational institutions under Article 15(4). However, that can only be for socially and educationally backward classes, SCs and STs. The Articles 16(4) and 15(4) emphatically state the principles of equality that are already implicit in the first clauses of both the Articles—that of equality of opportunity and non-discrimination. The provision for reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens is a matter of policy of the Government, of course subject to the constitutional parameters and well settled principle of judicial review.

The Council of Ministers relied on the Narayan Rane Committee Report in case of Maratha community and Report of the Study Group under the Chairmanship of Dr M Rahman (henceforth referred to as "the SG") in case of 50 Muslim communities while deciding to reserve seats for jobs and in educational institutions. It would be fundamentally wrong to club the conglomerate of sub-castes that go by the name Maratha caste as one class. The Maratha community has two major conglomerates of peasant sub-castes and the warrior sub-castes. The former conglomerate is called kunbis while the latter is called shayannav kulis.

While the warrior conglomerate is more dominant, the peasant conglomerate is less accommodated compared to the former. Both maintain their separate identity through prohibition of inter-caste marriage between the two. To classify both the conglomerates as one class for the purpose of determining backwardness is therefore fundamentally a wrong proposition.

Interestingly, neither the SG identified or named the 50 Muslim communities to be backward nor the decision of the Council of Ministers uploaded on the website names those 50 communities who will be entitled to 5% reservations in jobs and educational institutions. There is no indication who and on what criteria backwardness was judged.

The decision of the Council of Ministers seems to be taken less for fulfilment of Constitutional obligation of State to progressively reduce inequalities by ensuring that the classes of citizens which were historically denied opportunities have a fair opportunity to overcome any disadvantage they may be suffering. Reservations are a political tool in the hands of a ruling party to mobilize a caste or community for electoral advantage. Sharad Pawar told media that there was nothing wrong if a ruling party wanted to exploit the opportunity for electoral gains. Muslims have been demanding reservations in government jobs and seats in educational institutions for over 30 years. However, their pleas went unheeded. After losing 42 of the 48 Lok Sabha constituencies in Maharashtra in the 16th general elections to BJP-SS-RPI alliance, the Congress wants to regain lost ground by wooing the Maratha community with reservations.

Political parties constantly defeat this Constitutional principle for their narrow political gains. Instead of ensuring individual freedoms and ensuring justice—social, economic and political, they chose the easy way out—to become vehicles to promote the interests of the elite of assorted collectives either based on caste, community or ethnicity and rally help them construct rigid boundaries and deepen identities. In order to facilitate the elite to construct boundaries and deepen identities based on caste, religion, language, region or ethnicity, the parties misuse or want to misuse authority and institutions for governance to subvert the Constitution and distribute largesse based on caste and community.

In the process these parties convert India into a federation of communities based on religion, caste, region, language or ethnicity, with different communities enjoying different privileges. Some would demand Marathas should get superior rights and privileges while others would justify other castes are entitled to such a treatment and still others would scream that Muslim community should get better treatment than others and yet others would claim that Hindus being indigenous have a better right. Collectively all of them are making a mockery of the constitution and subverting rule of law.

The rights and entitlement then get negotiated on the basis of numerical strength, muscle power and political clout that a particular collective can muster in an environment of might is right.

At the end of the article he also one question is “If the politicians and the elite of communities do not see reason and wisdom injustice for citizens as citizens, on the principle of equality and equity, will the other institutions of democracy rise to the occasion to ensure justice for all?”

Marathas, Muslims and Maharashtra's politics of reservations

According to the reporter of Rediff.com, the Maharashtra government, as a parting shot before facing the assembly election in October, announced a new reservation quota -- 16 percent for Marathas and 5 percent for Muslims.

Before this announcement Maharashtra had 52 percent reservations, which had crossed the limit set at 50 percent by the Supreme Court. With these fresh reservations the total percentage of reservations in the state has gone up to 73 percent. A Public Interest Litigation has already been filed, claiming that the Marathas are not a poor and backward caste.

II. Conclusion

There seems to be no argument against the 5 percent reservations for Muslims, who most agree have a high population of poor and deprived people. The main controversy erupted over reservations for the Marathas. The problem lies in the popular perception that the Marathas are a rich, politically powerful and dominant caste in the state. One can't blame anyone that such misconceptions have become popular. Most powerful politicians in the state belong to the Maratha community. 10 of Maharashtra's 17 chief ministers have been Marathas including the first CM, Yashwantrao Chavan. Former Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan is also a Maratha.

Since the birth of Maharashtra in 1960 a majority of legislators belong to the Maratha community. The community also controls educational institutions, developmental boards and 168 out of the 200 sugar cooperatives in the state. It is no surprise then that people tend to believe it is a rich and powerful community and do not need any reservation. The truth is different.

The tragedy of this community is that only 137 Maratha families are the dominant players in state politics. The disparity is so wide, that the rest of the Maratha community isn't even half as rich, forget being powerful.

The reason being that there are 96 clans and most are backward and poor. The Kunbis, known as poor tillers, form a large part of this community. The problem within the Marathas is that Maratha politicians have failed their community. They failed to deliver the goods to the community and most of all include the poorest in the mainstream from early on. As a result, Maratha politicians encounter growing bitterness and want to appease their community by announcing reservations for employment and education. The politicians have hurriedly ignored the most pertinent issues, says political scholar Suhas Palshikar.

'It is clear that the social stratification and economic distress faced by the Marathas engaged in agriculture is unlikely to be meaningfully addressed merely by demanding OBC status for the community.'

We can't forget that Maharashtra is primarily an agrarian economy. Many agricultural peasants and small-time farmers have been reduced to labour, among them many clans of Marathas. Instead of conducting proper studies to study the impact of reservations, which groups have benefited and who really require it, the government has only made it more political.

Former Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan, who came to Maharashtra to clean up the Congress party and the government, was initially reluctant about the move, fearing legal problems. This policy of reservations has been announced to help the ruling Congress-Nationalist Congress Party coalition try and avert a washout in the forthcoming assembly election.

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