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Marathas Reservation

Published On: 28-01-2024

Why is in news? As Maharashtra CM assures quota to Marathas, why OBCs are planning to take to streets and courts

Even as the Maratha community awaits the **finalisation of rules on Maratha reservation**, the **communities under Other Backward Class (OBC)** fear a shrinking of their 27 per cent reservation pie and are ready to take the battle to the street and the courts.

While the proposed formulation does not tinker with the 50 per cent limit set by the Supreme Court, it allows Marathas to claim reservation under the 27 per cent set aside for OBCs. So there will be more claimants not just for government jobs and educational institutions reserved for OBCs, but also for OBC-reserved seats in local civic bodies.

Kunbis:

Kunbis are farmers, and most of them in Vidarbha and northern Maharashtra have **Kunbi certificates and OBC status**.

But many from the Maratha community in Marathwada and western Maharashtra do not have Kunbi certificates, and hence are not entitled to OBC reservation.

While Marathas are estimated to **account for 32 per cent of the state's population** as per the Narayan Rane committee appointed by the Congress-NCP government in 2013, there are **no estimates of Kunbi or Kunbi-Marathas** in the state.

Marathas:

The Marathas are a **group of castes** comprising **peasants and landowners, among others**, constituting **nearly 33 per cent of state's population**.

While most Marathas are Marathi-speaking, not all Marathi-speaking people belong to the Maratha community.

The demand for Maratha reservation is not new in the state. The first protest over this was **held 32 years ago** by Mathadi Labour Union leader Annasaheb Patil in Mumbai.

This **politically dominant community** in the state comprises nearly one-third of the population of the state.

Historically, the Marathas have been identified as a **'warrior' caste** known for their substantial land holdings.

Since the establishment of Maharashtra state in 1960, **12 out of 20 chief ministers**, including Eknath Shinde, have been **from the Maratha community**.

Despite facing challenges related to land distribution and agrarian issues over the years, the middle-class and lower-middle-class Marathas have seen a decline in prosperity, **yet they continue to play a vital role in the rural economy**.

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Timeline of Maratha Reservation Issue:

November 2018: Maharashtra government **approves reservation** for Marathas **under the Socially and Educationally Backward Class Act**, based on the Backward Class Commission's findings led by M G Gaikwad.

June 2019: The Bombay High Court **upholds the constitutional validity of the Maratha quota** under the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018. It **reduces the quota from 16% to 12% in education and 13% in government jobs**, following the recommendations of the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission.

May 2021: A five-judge Constitution bench of the **Supreme Court, strikes down the provisions** of the Maharashtra law providing reservation to the Maratha community. The decision is made on the grounds that it **exceeds the 50% quota limit** set by the court in its **1992 Indra Sawhney (Mandal) judgment**.

November 2022: After the Supreme Court **upholds the 10% quota for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)**, the Maharashtra state government allows economically weaker members of the Maratha community to benefit from the EWS quota until the issue of Maratha reservation is resolved.

September 2023: Taking note of Jarange-Patil's protest, the state on September 7 **formed a five-member committee under Justice (retired) Sandeep K Shinde** to study the **procedure of giving Kunbi (OBC) certificates to Marathas**, based on documents, including revenue records, from Nizam period.

The state government said that **until the issue of Maratha reservation is resolved**, economically weaker members of the community can benefit from the EWS quota. The government had also said that a **new dedicated panel will be formed for a detailed survey** of the 'backwardness' of the community.

Existing reservation in Maharashtra:

In the state, following the **2001 State Reservation Act**, the total reservation is **52 per cent**.

RESERVATION SO FAR

Maharashtra has **52%** quota for various communities

Scheduled Castes	13.0	
Scheduled Tribes	7.0	
Other Backward Classes	19.0	
Special Backward Classes	2.0	
Nomadic Tribes-A	3.0	
Nomadic Tribes-B	2.5	
Nomadic Tribes-C (Dhangar)	3.5	
Nomadic Tribes-D (Vanjari)	2.0	

Source: Maharashtra government

This included quotas for Scheduled Caster (13%), Scheduled Tribes (7%), Other Backward Classes (19%), Special Backward Class (2%), Vimukta Jati (3%), Nomadic Tribe B (2.5%), Nomadic Tribe C-Dhangar (3.5%) and Nomadic Tribe D-Vanjari (2%).

With the addition of the 12-13 per cent Maratha quota, the total reservation in the state had gone up to 64-65 per cent. The 10 % EWS quota is also effective in the state.

Besides Marathas, communities including **Dhangar, Lingayats and Muslims** have **also raised demands** for reservation.

Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission (MSBCC):

The commission was headed by M G Gaikwad.

The 11-member commission surveyed nearly 45, 000 families from two villages from each of 355 talukas with more than 50 per cent Maratha population.

The report submitted on November 15, 2018 said the **Maratha community is socially, economically and educationally backward.**

Moreover, the report said that in 2013-2018, a total of 2,152 (23.56%) **Maratha farmers died by suicide**, against total 13, 368 farmer suicides.

The Commission also found that **88.81 % Maratha women are involved in physical labour** for earning a livelihood, besides the physical domestic work they perform for the family.

In **educational backwardness**, it found that 13.42 % of Marathas are illiterate, 35.31 % primary educated, 43.79 % HSC and SSC, 6.71 % undergraduates and postgraduates and 0.77 % technically and professionally qualified.

Indira Sawhney judgment, 1992:

The Indira Sawhney case is **also known as the Mandal Commission case**. In this case, the Supreme Court stated that:

Backward Classes of the Citizens of in **Article 16(4)** can be identified on the **basis of caste and not only on the economic basis.**

The Supreme Court **upheld the Mandal Commission's 27 percent quota for backward classes**, as well as the principle that the combined scheduled-caste, scheduled-tribe, and backward-class beneficiaries **should not exceed 50 percent of India's population.**

Reservation for backward classes should be **confined to initial appointments only** and not extend to promotions.

State governments were called upon to **identify creamy layer amongst the backward classes** and exclude them from the purview of reservation.

Root Causes of Maratha Reservation Demand:

The demand for Maratha reservation has its roots in the **underdeveloped areas of Marathwada and other regions** in Maharashtra.

Districts like Beed, Parbhani, Nanded, Aurangabad, and Jalna in Marathwada have been the **epicenters of the agitation**, and the movement **subsequently spread to other parts** of the state.

Many of these areas **face economic and industrial underdevelopment**, exacerbating the challenges faced by the local population. Consistent droughts compound these issues.

Unlike western Maharashtra, Marathwada **lacks substantial industrial development**, leaving residents with limited employment opportunities beyond agriculture.

As **agriculture becomes increasingly unsustainable**, rural youth in Marathwada have limited options, leading to migration or involvement in aggressive political activism, often financially supported by certain political parties or leaders.

With a **scarcity of private sector jobs**, youth in Marathwada **focus on securing government jobs** through competitive examinations. As a result, the demand for reservations in these jobs becomes a prominent issue.

Conclusion:

Reservation, a **tool of positive discrimination**, empowers marginalized and economically challenged sections of society.

However, if these policies negatively impact social harmony by favouring some at the expense of others for political gain, reconsideration and gradual phasing out may be necessary.

Communities excluded from reservations may develop resentment against those included, deepening divisions. If a significant portion aspires to backwardness over progress, overall growth is hindered.

Rather than lowering entry barriers, we should promote meritocracy through financial aid.

Achieving a **balance between justice for the backward, equity for the forward, and system efficiency** demands strong political will and prudent policymaking, vital for the nation's sustainable progress.