

## QUOTA, OLD PLUS NEW

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of STs, SCs, and OBCs - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

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Reservations are sometimes criticised in a constructive manner by analysts who argue that quotas are cornered by a few jatis at the expense of those who “really need them”. Among Dalits, the Jatavs of Uttar Pradesh and the Mahars of Maharashtra have been targeted by such critiques. The India Human Development Survey, and its last two rounds of 2004-05 and 2011-12, helps us assess the limitations of such a discourse which, usually, does not rely on any solid data.

In terms of their annual per capita mean income (APCMI), Jatavs are not at all doing better than other important Dalit jatis of UP: They earned only Rs 6,135 a year in 2011-12, against Rs 6,643 for the Pasis and Rs 9,077 for the Dhobis. Interestingly, the APCMI of the Jatavs had increased by 125 per cent between 2004-05 and 2011-12, whereas that of the Pasis has jumped by 162 per cent and that of the Dhobis by 198 per cent.

Despite this increase, Dalits, with an average mean income of Rs 6,847 in 2011-12, continued to lag far behind all the other caste groups, including Brahmins (Rs 15,497) and Yadavs (Rs 12,271), something which may complicate the relations between the BSP and SP. The only Hindu jatis earning less than the average Dalits were the Lodhis and the Gaderias.

Jatavs did not do that well economically in spite of a marginal advantage in terms of education: In 2011-12, 2.5 per cent of them were graduates, when graduates represented only 0.5 per cent of the Pasis and 0.6 per cent of the Dhobis. Jatavs lagged behind other Dalit jatis from the point of view of their APCMI despite their comparatively higher access to the salariat: More than 10 per cent of Jatavs had a salaried job in 2011-12, against 6.6 per cent of the Pasis and 4.5 per cent of the Dhobis. Note that, in contrast, more than 10 per cent of upper castes have graduated in UP and more than 22 per cent of Brahmins were part of the salariat.

We can explain the Jatav paradox by factoring in the class element: Jatavs are polarised, with, on the one hand, an elite group enjoying a good education as well as government jobs, and on the other hand, a mass of poor. Indeed, no Dalit jati counts so many agricultural labourers in their midst in 2011-12 (63 per cent, against 34 per cent among Dhobis). As a result, among the Jatavs, the poorest 20 per cent earned 10 times less than the richest 20 per cent (Rs 2,745 against Rs 26,363).

The situation of the Dalits of Maharashtra is not very different. Certainly, Mahars were more affluent than Mangs and Chambhars in 2011-12: Their APCMI was Rs 27,177 (and even Rs 31,241 in the case of the Buddhists) when it had reached only Rs 25,274 in the case of the Chambhars and Rs 23,070 in the case of the Mangs. But this gap is not so large, whereas

Mahars continued to lag behind Brahmins (Rs 44,638) and Marathas (Rs 37,255). The rather limited gap between Dalit jatis in Maharashtra is mirrored in similar levels of education too: About 5 per cent of the members of the three jatis — with very minor variations — have graduated (compared to 26 per cent among Brahmins).

Similarly, the percentage of salaried people among these three jatis was rather homogenous, ranging from 22 per cent (Chambhars) to 28 per cent (Mahars). In contrast, more than 54 per cent of Brahmins were part of the salariat.

These data do not allow the neutral observer to argue that Mahars have been the only or even the main beneficiaries of reservations for Scheduled Castes: All Dalits have gained something. If among the winners, some have been more equal than others, it is in terms of class. Among the Mahars, for instance, the socioeconomic differentiation is as pronounced as among the Jatavs. Here again, the richest 20 per cent earned 10 times more than the poorest 20 per cent (Rs 68,401 against Rs 7,254). These inequalities have something to do with occupation as all Mahars are not employees of the public sector, far from that: More than 44 per cent of them are still daily labourers.

A few lessons can be drawn from these data. First, to be a Dalit in UP and to be a Dalit in Maharashtra is not the same thing in terms of income, education and occupation. Second, Dalits are not catching up yet — far from that — even if the growth rate of their APCMI is among the highest. It was more than 200 per cent between 2004-05 and 2011-12 — a record — but Mahars were still earning 40 per cent less than the Brahmins of Maharashtra and 27 per cent less than the Marathas.

Third, the socioeconomic differentiation within the Dalit jatis is as pronounced as in other caste groups (see our article, 'Anxieties of the dominant', IE, January 3, 2018). Therefore, it is wrong to assume that those who need access to reservations because they continue to remain at the bottom of the pyramid for generations will get it if jati-based sub-quotas were introduced, as was recommended recently in a report commissioned by the UP government ('Quota and bad faith', IE, February 8). In the case of the Dalits, this would mean, for instance, that Jatavs and Mahars would not have access to the 15 per cent quotas, but only to a sub-quota reserved to them. That would not help the poorest among the Jatavs and the Mahars who, on the contrary, would have to compete with the middle class of their caste group for a smaller number of positions. To address the problems of the most disadvantaged, a class element has to be taken into account within each jati.

But the "creamy layer" formula — which relies on class-related criteria — would not do either because of the stigma still associated with untouchability. Surveys show that when the same CV was sent to a potential employer in response to a call for applications, those with a Brahmin name were much more likely to result in a call for job talk/interview, compared to the CV bearing a Dalit name — which generated a large number of negative responses (or no reply at all). Indeed, in institutions where there is no reservation for SCs (the judiciary, Rajya Sabha, etc.), Dalits remain massively under-represented despite the fact that they have, in their ranks, a large number of people with the required diplomas and skills.

By validating the 10 per cent quota for the "general category", the Supreme Court has unintentionally opened a window of opportunity for revisiting the reservation policy in favour of the needful Dalits. First, this decision makes it possible to go beyond the 50 per cent threshold (and not only in Tamil Nadu anymore). Second, it legitimises the use of socioeconomic criteria in the creation of reservations. In addition to the 15 per cent quota, that Dalits need to retain because of the stigma still affecting them, they should also receive a quota based on socioeconomic criteria, since it is among the Dalits that the largest numbers of poor are still

found. This recommendation should apply to Adivasis too.

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