

Gujjars for categorisation of OBC quota

Laying siege:Gujjar agitators sit on railway tracks to block trains near Bharatpur in Rajasthan.File photo: PTI

With the Supreme Court reiterating the 50% ceiling set on reservation in jobs and education and effectively freezing the Rajasthan government's bid to provide quota to Gujjars through a Bill passed in the State Assembly, the community here has demanded categorisation of the Other Backward Class reservation.

A Cabinet subcommittee, tasked with interacting with Gujjars to find a solution to the quota issue, has found the demand difficult to fulfil and suggested that the community be recognised as “most backward” and given 1% reservation for which there is still room. The subcommittee's members are Social Justice Minister Arun Chaturvedi and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Rajendra Rathore.

A Bill passed in the Assembly on October 26 had created the “most backward” category within the OBCs for Gujjars and four other nomadic communities and given 5% reservation to them, increasing the OBC quota from 21% to 26% and taking the overall quota in the State to 54%.

“Only solution”

Gujjar Aarakshan Sangharsh Samiti general secretary Shailendra Singh, who was among the Gujjar leaders who met the subcommittee members here on Wednesday, said categorisation of OBC quota was the “only solution” available with regard to the issue.

Mr. Singh said while the advanced communities within the OBC category were mostly getting the reservation benefits, the “more backward” among the OBCs were lagging behind. He suggested that the State OBC Commission take up the task of quota categorisation on the lines of the mandate of the Justice G. Rohini Commission appointed by the Centre last month to examine OBC sub-categorisation in order to achieve greater social justice.

SC leash

The Supreme Court had last week restrained the Rajasthan government from taking any action or decision on the administrative side or in any manner conferring the benefit of reservation which will have the result of crossing the total reservation beyond 50%. The State government was asked to maintain status quo till the High Court finally decides a pending case against the impugned Bill.

The High Court had also on November 9 restrained the State government from implementing the provisions of the Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions in the State and of Appointment and Posts in Services under the State) Bill, 2017, passed in the Assembly.

Earlier attempts

Gujjars and others were earlier grouped as a special backward class and the State government had tried thrice to grant 5% reservation to them. However, the legislation was struck down every time by the High Court, which ruled that the quota had not only exceeded the 50% limit, but was also not supported by the quantifiable data supporting the claim of Gujjars' backwardness.

The State government has maintained that as per the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Indra Sawhney* case, special circumstances exist in Rajasthan for giving reservation to OBCs beyond the 50% ceiling. The State OBC Commission has recommended giving quota to the communities

classified as OBCs, which comprise 52% of the State's population.

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