

General Studies-2; Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes;

Sub-Categorisation of OBCs

1) Introduction

- The Union Cabinet approved to set up a commission which will examine the issue of sub-categorisation of the Other Backward Classes (OBC).
- The proposed commission, will be set up under Article 340 of the Constitution
- In the Indian Constitution, OBCs are described as "socially and educationally backward classes".

2) Mandate of the Committee

- Examine the "extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation" among Central OBC list.
- Work out the mechanism, criteria and parameters for the actual sub-categorisation.
- Bringing order to the Central list of OBCs by removing any repetitions.

3) Background

- The Supreme Court in Indra Sawhney and others vs. Union of India case (1992) had observed that there is no Constitutional or legal bar on states for categorizing backward classes.
- Already 11 States, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Jammu region have such a categorisation in State government jobs.
- There is no sub categorisation in the central list.

4) Need for Sub-Categorisation

- The benefits of reservation have not been distributed equally.
- Large segments of the weaker sections and backward classes continue to have no access to quality education or meaningful employment.
- The relatively rich and dominant sections among the backward castes have tended to take up a larger share of the reservation pie.
- Further differentiating caste groups under backward classes will seek to ensure more equitable distribution of reservation benefits
- There is inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation because of the broad categories of OBCs included in the central list.
- The National Commission for Backward Classes had recommended sub-categorisation in 2011
- A standing committee too had recommended this.

5) Implications

- The move could have a far-reaching political and social impact
- It will ensure that the benefits are distributed fairly among constituent castes instead of going only to a few dominant ones.
- The Centre's decision will be a significant addition to the Mandal Commission-based OBC reservation regulations.
- Politically, this can be seen as an attempt by the government to reach out to the most backward castes among the OBCs.

6) Challenges

- It is likely to face opposition from dominant OBC groups
- The regional parties championing the interests of dominant OBC castes are likely to oppose such sub-categorisation.
- An earlier attempt to provide sub-quotas for OBCs in Andhra Pradesh was stalled by courts on the ground that religion-based quota is not permitted.

7) Creamy layer cap raised

- The Union Cabinet increased the “creamy layer” ceiling for the OBCs to Rs. 8 lakh per annum from the existing Rs. 6 lakh for Central government jobs.
- This means that the umbrella of reservation is widened and those earning up to Rs. 8 lakh per annum would now get the benefits.

8) Some Facts

- The OBCs are entitled to 27% reservations in public sector employment and higher education.
- The list of OBCs is maintained by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
- Under Article 340 of the Indian Constitution, it is obligatory for the government to promote the welfare of the OBCs.
- The Constitution refers to the term ‘backward classes’ in Articles 15(4), 16(4) and 340(1).
- Articles 15(4) and 16(4) empower the State to make special provisions for any socially and educationally backward class of citizens.

