Sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes

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Why is in news? Why are Rohini panel's findings important?

The **Justice G. Rohini-led Commission on the sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes groups**, constituted in October 2017, submitted its long-awaited report to the President of India on July 31, after having received 14 extensions in the last six years. The Commission was initially asked to finish its report in 12 weeks.

About the commission:

The **President had formed the Commission** headed by former Delhi High Court Chief Justice G. Rohini **in October 2017**.

Its ain is to **examine the question of sub-categorising** the **over 2,600 caste groups listed in the Central OBC list** .

Members: The Commission had as a Member, Dr. J.K. Bajaj of the Centre for Policy Studies with representatives from the Anthropological Survey of India, the Office of the Registrar General of India, and the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry.

The Commission was tasked with **first examining how much of 27% reservation** (jobs and education) **and other government benefits meant for OBCs was dominated by which caste groups**.

The Commission had arrived at the conclusion that a **small number of caste groups among all OBC groups**, were **dominating reservation** and other government benefits.

Further, the Commission went on to **explore ways of sub-categorising these existing OBC groups** in order to make sure benefits can be redistributed equitably. This involved breaking up all OBC caste groups into further categories based on how dominant the communities have been in availing government benefits meant for OBCs.

While the Commission's report has now been submitted to the President, it has been learnt that the government will not act on the recommendations in it without detailed deliberations with all concerned stakeholders.

In addition to this, the Commission was also **tasked with rationalising the Central OBC list** by suggesting corrections and replacements in spellings, which will result in minor changes to the entries.

Objectives of the Commission:

To examine the representation of OBCs in the Central List of Reservation in central government jobs and higher education institutions.

To devise a scientific method to sub-categorize OBCs based on various criteria, norms, and parameters.

To identify and classify the castes, communities, sub-castes, or synonyms in the Central List into their respective sub-categories.

To suggest corrections for any mistakes, ambiguities, inconsistencies, and errors of spelling or transcription in the Central List of OBCs.

Who are the OBCs?

The Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are a **group of socially and educationally disadvantaged castes** in India.

They **constitute a significant portion of the population** and have been **granted 27% reservation** in jobs and education under the central government.

To ensure equitable distribution of benefits among all OBC communities, the idea of sub-categorization within the OBCs was proposed. The Rohini Commission, established in 2017, was tasked with examining this issue.

Need for Sub-Categorisation:

Larger benefits to small Groups: Rich and dominant sections occupy a major chunk of reservations among OBCs.

Due to inequalities and further inequalities within unequal entities.

Failure in **effectively preventing large sections of the creamy layer** from taking advantage of the quota system to the detriment of the poorer sections among their own caste groups.

To **ensure a more equitable distribution of reservation** benefits by further differentiating caste groups coming under backward classes on the basis of their levels of social and economic backwardness.

Lacunae in categorisation of the creamy layer led to the need to differentiate among the caste groups.

Vote-bank politics has caused prioritising of caste-based categorisation over income-based differentiation to identify reservation beneficiaries.

The **reservation pie is limited**, and no group, whether rich or poor, dominant or subservient, can hope to gain except at the expense of another socio-economic category.

Other commissions related to OBCs:

The **Kalelkar Commission**, **set up in 1953**, was the **first to identify backward classes** other than the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) at the national level.

The **Mandal Commission Report, 1980** estimated the OBC population at 52% and classified 1,257 communities as backward. It **recommended increasing the existing quotas**, which were only forSC/ST, from 22.5% to 49.5% to include the OBCs.

Challenges faced in Sub-Categorisation:

Absence of Data for the population of various communities to compare with their representation in jobs and admissions.

Political Issue: Sub-Categorisation will lead to discontent among dominant OBC groups. Regional parties oppose this as seen in Andhra Pradesh when an attempt to provide sub-quotas for OBCs was stalled by courts on the ground that a religion-based quota is not permitted.

Vote-Bank politics over the prioritisation of caste-based categorisation over income-based differentiation to identify reservation beneficiaries.

Conclusion:

Now that the Commission's report is tabled to President of India and the government is expected to hold deliberations on the recommendations contained in it, before thinking about implementing any part of it.

The report has not been made public yet.