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CASTE BASED RESERVATION IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IS BENEFICIARY OR DISCRIMINATORY, A SURVEY BASED ON THE IMPACT OF THE RESERVATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

This study explore the effects of caste based reservation in educational institutions, this study has served as an aid for understanding the people's opinion on the caste based reservations. Reservations in the educational institutions were introduced as a measure to promote social justice and equality from the grass root level, to uplift the historically marginalized communities by ensuring fair access to education. This study explores whether the caste based reservations in educational institutions serves as a beneficial tool for social inclusion or functions as a discriminatory practice against non reserved categories. The research further analyzes the misconceptions of people about reservation policy and analyzes the opinion of both stance who claims it as beneficiary and people who claims it as discriminatory.

KEYWORD – Caste based reservation, social justice, marginalized communities, social inclusion, non reserved categories, educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study:

The caste system in India has been a deeply entrenched social hierarchy for thousands of years, defining people's social status, occupation, and access to resources. Historically, the lower castes- particularly the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes- were subjected to severe social, educational and economic discrimination, resulting in generations of marginalization and deprivation. With the advent of independence in 1947, India's founding leaders recognized the necessity of affirmative action to correct these historical injustices and to build a socially just society.

The constitution of India through article 15(4), 16(4) and 46, empowered the state to take special measures for advancement of socially and educationally backward classes. Thus, the reservation policy was introduced as a form of positive discrimination- to ensure that those who had been historically denied education and access. This included fixed quotes for SCs, STs and OBCs in educational institutions, government jobs and legislatures.

Over the decades, the reservation policy has undeniably improved the representation of marginalized groups in education. Literacy levels among SC/ST/OBC communities have significantly risen, and a new generation of educated individuals has emerged from

communities that were once excluded from the academic mainstream. The policy has been instrumental in breaking barriers, providing visibility, and promoting social mobility.

However, in contemporary India, the reservation system has also become a matter of intense debate. Critics argue that it perpetuates caste consciousness, compromises meritocracy and discriminates against economically weaker sections of non-reserved categories. Others believe that the system has not yet achieved its intended objectives due to issues such as the cream layer phenomenon, inadequate outreach to the most deprived and persistent social stigma. The introduction of the 10% reservation for economically weaker section in 2019 has further broadened the discourse, signalling a shift toward a more economic-based approach to affirmative action.

In the educational sphere, the reservation debate is particularly complex. While access to education has improved for marginalized groups, the quality of support, inclusivity, and campus environment remains questionable. Issue such as caste-based bias, peer discrimination, and lack of academic support system continue to challenge the very objective of social justice that reservation seeks to achieve.

Thus, this study seeks to explore the evolving dynamics of caste-based reservation in educational institutions- analyzing whether it remains a beneficial tool for achieving equality or whether it has, in certain contexts, turned into a discriminatory mechanisms affecting the broader goal of social harmony and academic excellence.

1.2 Rationale of the study:

The rationale this study lies in the persistent controversy and social relevance of caste-based reservation in India's educational system. Although the policy of reservation was initially implemented as a corrective measure to address historical injustice and promote social equality, its continued

necessity and structure are increasingly questioned in contemporary society.

More than seventy-five after India's independence, the socio-economic conditions of several marginalized communities have improved significantly. Yet, inequality, social exclusion and discrimination remain prevalent, especially in access to quality education. Simultaneously, new debates have emerged around the fairness of extending reservations indefinitely, the exclusion of economically disadvantaged individuals from non-reserved groups, and the adequacy of existing policy frameworks in addressing modern form of inequality.

Educational institutions serve as the foundation for social mobility and empowerment. Therefore, examining whether caste-based reservation are still achieving their constitutional purpose-or whether they have inadvertently created new disparities- is crucial for ensuring that the principles of justice, quality, and merit coexist harmoniously.

This study is also relevant in light of recent policy changes, such as the introduction of the economically weaker sections reservations and the national educational policy which emphasize inclusivity, quality and accessibility in education. By evaluating the impact of caste-based reservation within this changing landscape, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing policy dialogue on reforming on India's affirmative action framework.

Ultimately, this research seeks to provide a balanced analysis- acknowledged both the benefits and limitations of the reservation system to help policymakers, educators and scholars design a more equitable and efficient approach to educational inclusion that reflects the needs of contemporary India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

This study is built upon the principles of social justice, equality of opportunity and affirmative action as enshrined in the Indian constitution. It explains the relationship between caste-based inequalities, reservation policies and their impact on educational outcomes. The framework seeks to analyze whether reservation functions as a beneficial mechanism to achieve to achieve equity or whether it has evolved into a discriminatory system affecting merit and inclusiveness.

2.2 THEORETICAL BASIS:

1. RAWL'S THEORY OF JUSTICE:

John Rawls emphasizes that inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. This justifies affirmative action like caste-based reservation as a tool for distributive justice.

2. SOCIAL EXCLUSION THEORY:

This theory explains how marginalized groups are systematically excluded from the mainstream opportunities. Reservation acts as an instrument to integrate them into

Educational and socio- economic systems .

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

3.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the historical background and constitutional basis of caste based reservation in India.
2. To analyze the impact of reservation policies on access to education among scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and promoted social mobility.
3. To examine the extent to which the reservation policies have reduced educational inequality and promoted social mobility.
4. To identify challenges and limitations in the implementation of reservation policies educational institutions.

5. To explore perceptions and attitudes of different social groups toward caste-based reservation.

6. To assess whether caste-based reservation promotes inclusivity or perpetuates discrimination in modern higher education systems.

7. To suggest reforms or policy recommendations that ensure a fair balance between social justice and meritocracy.

3.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Caste based reservation in India was introduced to promote social justice and provide equal educational opportunities to historically marginalized groups. However, in recent years, its relevance and fairness have become highly debated. While it has improved access to education for disadvantaged communities, critics argue that it now encourages reverse discrimination, affects meritocracy and reinforces caste divisions. Issues like cream layer, unequal benefits and the rise of economic-based reservations further complicate the policy. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze whether caste-based reservation in educational institutions remains beneficial or has become discriminatory in today's social and educational context.

3.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES:

H1: caste-based reservation system in educational institutions served as a means to promote equality among the young minds.

H2: caste-based reservation system spreads the sense of hatred among the students as the talented ones are denied a chance due to caste based reservation.

H3: there is a misunderstanding among the people about the percentage of reservation share among different categories.

3.4 POPULATION SIZE:

The target population for this study comprises students enrolled in higher educational

institutions across India, particularly those who belong to scheduled caste, scheduled tribe,

Other backward classes and general categories

3.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE:

The sampling techniques for this study, include the students and others who are affected by the caste based reservation. This method is suitable for this research.

3.5 DATA TYPE AND COLLECTION TECHNIQUES:

This study is based on the primary source of data from the individuals who have been affected from the caste based reservation. This data is collected through the responses given by the individuals to the questionnaire on the caste based reservation in educational institutions.

3.6 RESEARCH LIMITATION:

DATA ANALYSIS:

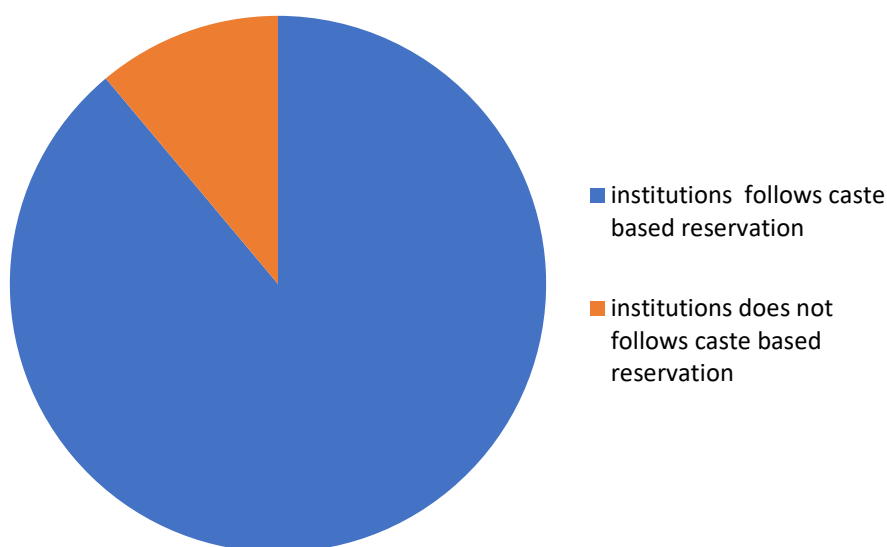
The data is collected from 99 individuals out of which 77% of them are students.

This research is limited to opinion of individuals in Tamilnadu and does not cover the opinion of the people all over the country. Responses may be subject to social desirability bias, especially in self reported questionnaire.

3.7 RESEARCH GAP:

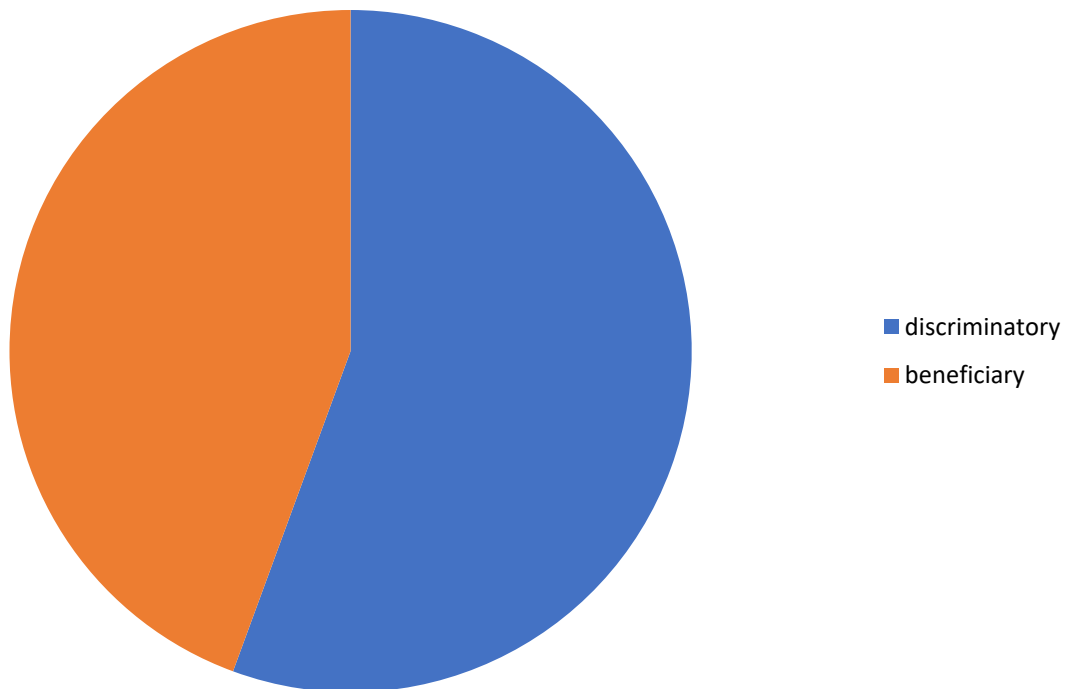
Most of the existing studies on caste based reservation focuses on its legal or political aspects rather than its real educational impact. Limited research examines whether the benefits have actually reached the most disadvantaged groups or how reservation affects the students experience in higher education. There is also a lack of updated data and analysis after the introduction of EWS quota and the NEP 2020. Hence the study aims to fill the gap by evaluating the current effectiveness and fairness of caste based reservation in educational institutions.

educational institutions following caste based reservation



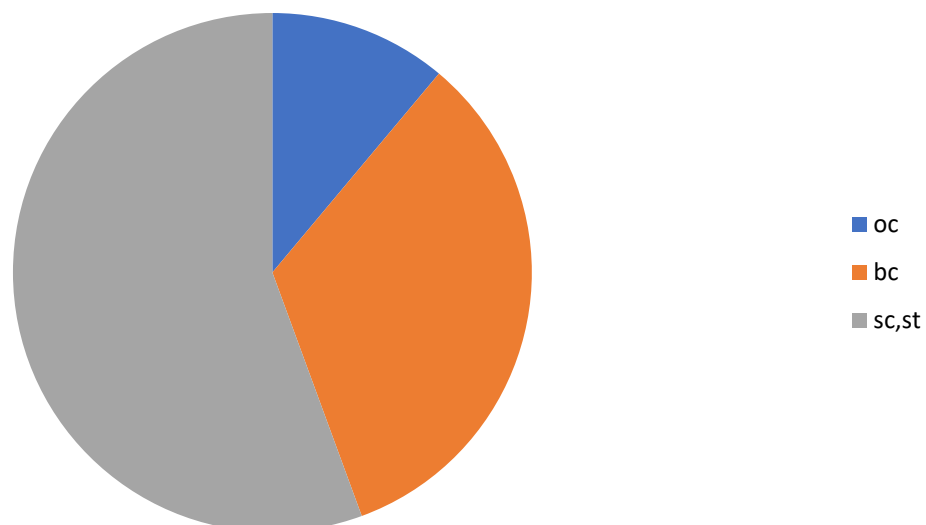
This chart shows that most of the educational institutions follow caste based reservation. With this we could conclude that the caste based reservation plays a vital role in getting seats in an educational institution. Only few among many institutions do not follow caste based reservation system.

opinion on caste based reservation



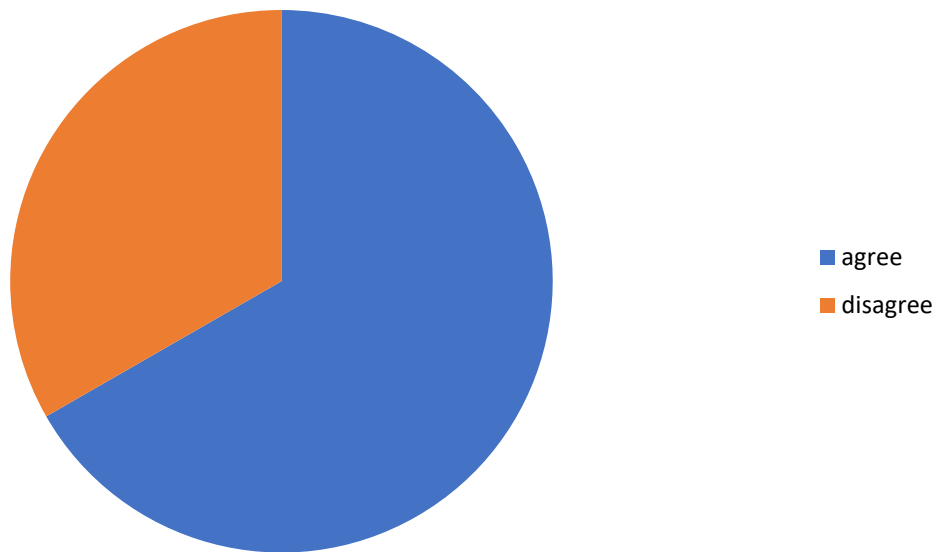
Higher percentage of people claim caste based reservation in educational institutions as a discriminatory factor. Many people feel that this system of reservation forbids the comparatively more talented person from obtaining a seat in desired educational institution and most feels that caste plays a major role than the talent and skills.

people's opinion on most benefitted from reservation system



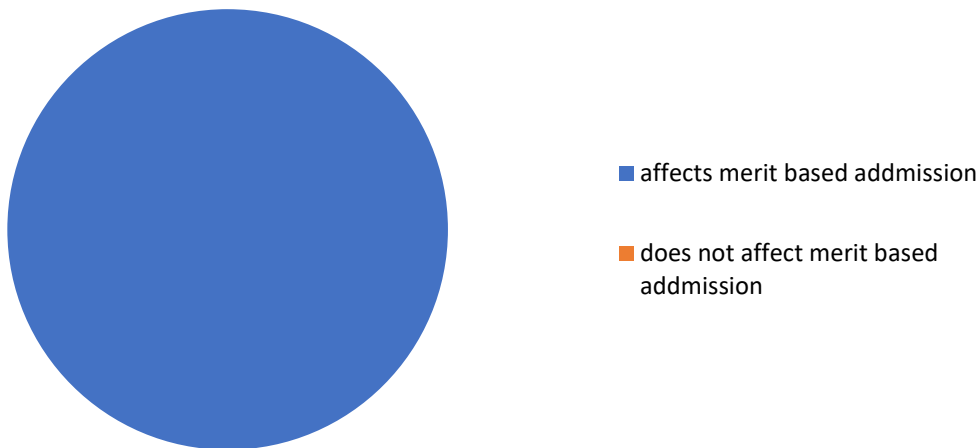
In the popular opinion of the people the focus mainly falls on the SCs and STs, that the SC and ST people get the higher percentage of reservation but in reality the OBCs get the higher percentage of reservation. This mistaken fact serves as a basis for hatred and it also makes a way to discrimination on SCs and STs,

people's opinion on fair access to learning



This shows a contradictory opinion of people, most people think caste based reservation in education as a discriminatory practice but at the same time the people claim that caste based reservation has also made way for fair access to education.

effects on merit based admission



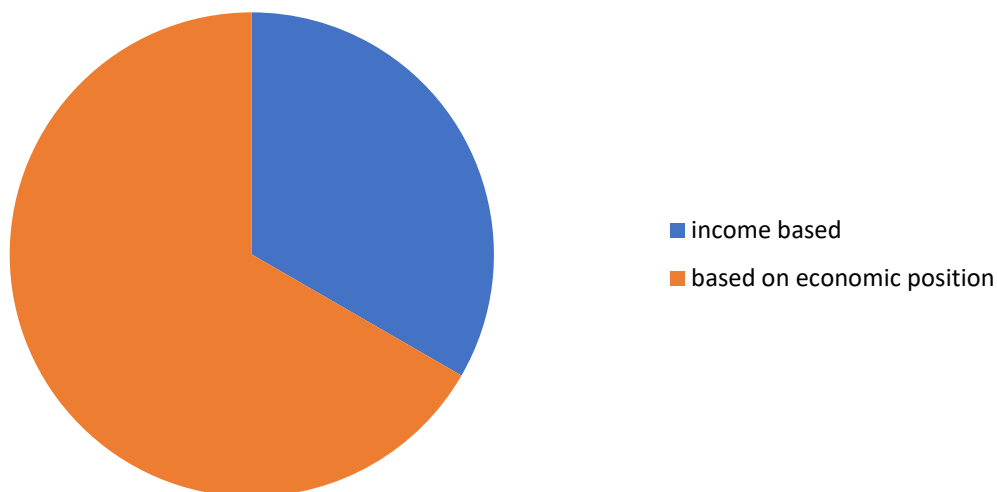
Caste based reservation has drastically affected the merit based admission in the opinion of the people. In the popular opinion of people they think that caste based reservation forbids people with more make from getting their deserving place.

do student addmitted through caste based reservation face discrimination



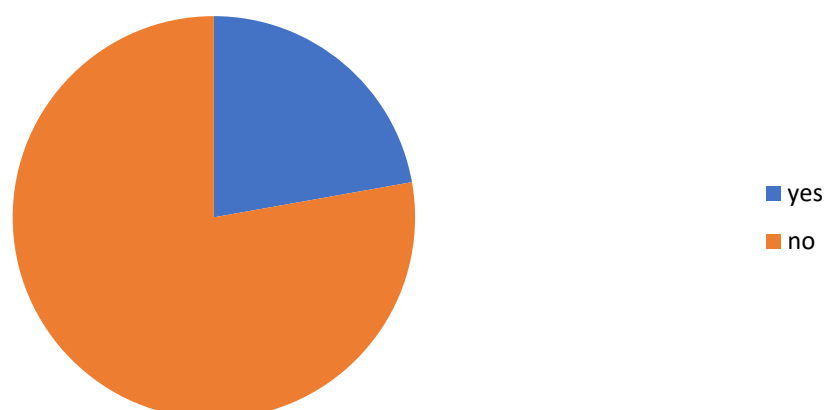
Students admitted through caste based reservation are most prone to face discrimination based on their caste. Caste based reservation can be both be served as a boon and curse.

opinion on mofication of reservation system



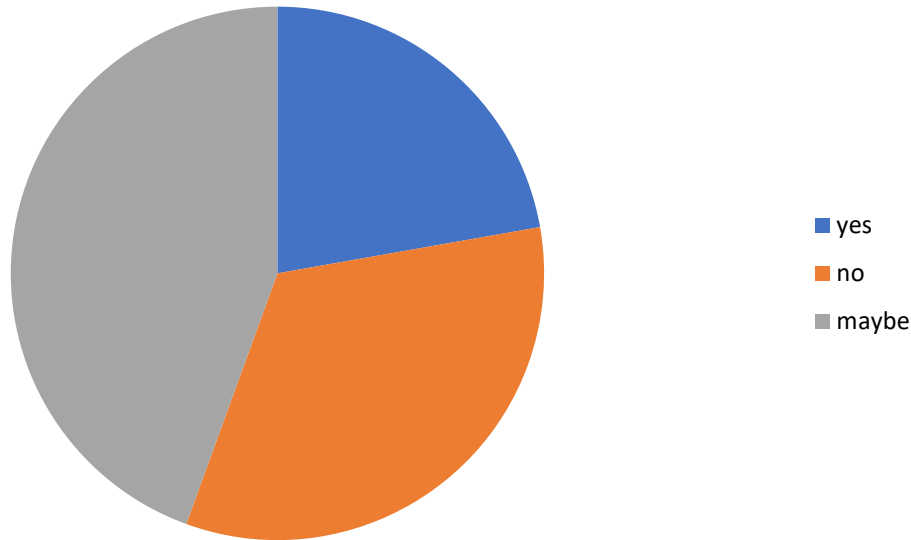
Most of the people think that there is a need for modification in the prevailing reservation system. In that more people think that reservation based on the economic position of the individual would be more equitable.

opinion on continuning the reservation on same form



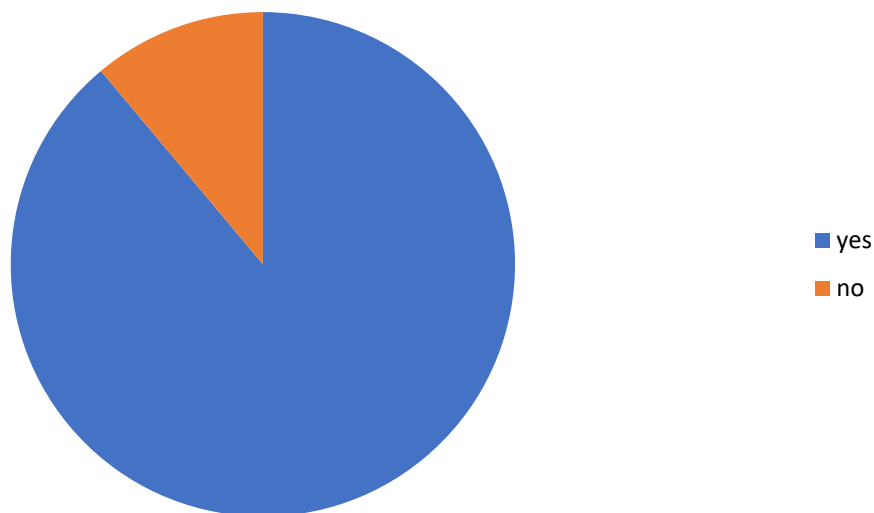
This response clearly shows that the people are not happy with the prevailing form of the reservation and there is need to modify the existing form of reservation.

do you think reservation motivates marginalized people to pursue education\



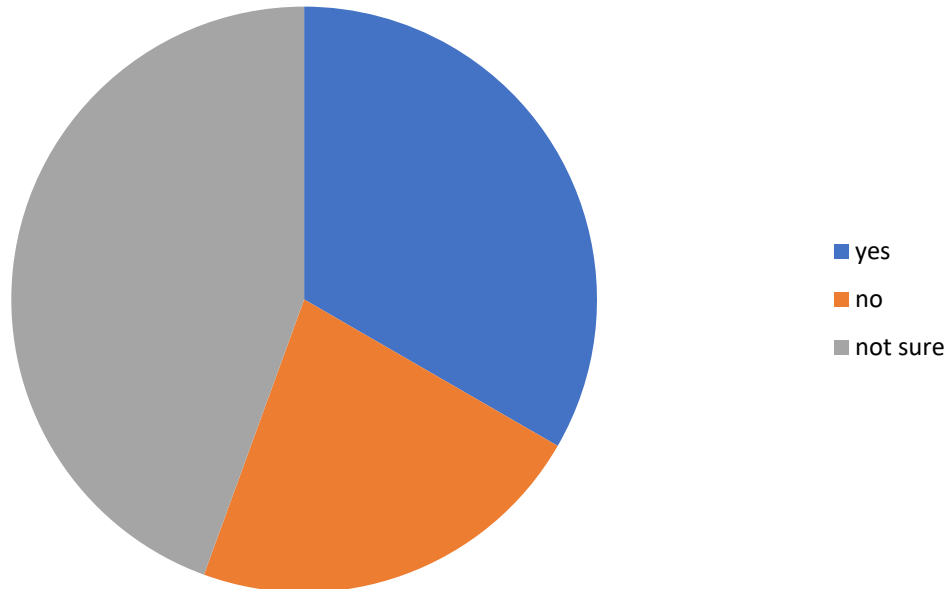
This gives a unclear opinion of the people. In my opinion people with a urge to pursue education has been benefitted from this form reservation.

should economically weaker students in oc also gets reservation



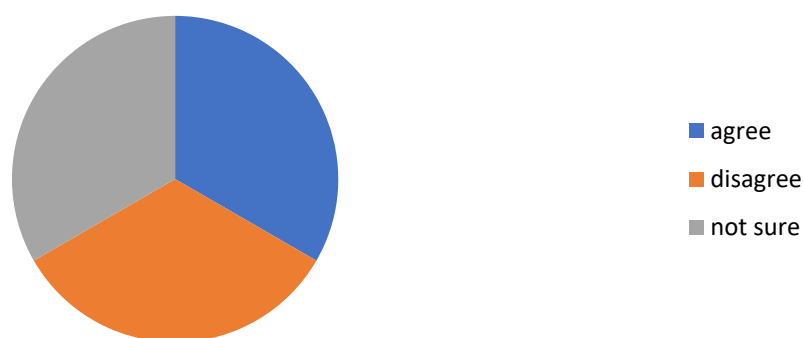
In the popular opinion of the people, people from OC category who comes from economically weaker section also deserve reservations.

opinion on removing reservation altogether in would improve educational equality



In opinion of the people removing reservation altogether is not a popular choice but the force a need for modification.

do you think caste based reservation has reduced the gap between privileged and under privileged students



We cannot conclude that the caste based reservation have totally removed the gap between the privileged and under privileged students but in the course of years this could be achieved.

FINDINGS:

The study found that caste-based reservation in educational institutions has played a vital role in improving access to education for marginalized communities such as SC, ST, OBC. It has helped increase enrolment and representation, fulfilling the constitutional aim of

promoting social justice. However, persistent inequalities remain, as dropout rates and academic performance among reserved category students continue to lag behind those of the general category. The benefits of reservation are also unevenly distributed, with the creamy layer within backward classes receiving the majority of advantages, while the

poorest sections still face barriers. Additionally, reservation policies have created mixed perceptions among students- some view them as essential for equality, while others perceive them as compromising merit and fairness. Economically weaker students from upper castes often remain excluded, indicating the need to integrate both caste and economic criteria in future reforms. Overall, while reservation remains beneficial in addressing historical injustice, it requires periodic review and restricting to ensure genuine inclusivity and equality in education.

.SUGGESTIONS:

First, the policy should undergo periodic review to assess its relevance and impact in changing social and economic conditions. The inclusion on both caste and economic criteria would ensure that benefits reach the truly disadvantaged, regardless of social background. The cream layer concept should be strictly implemented and periodically revised to prevent misuse by the relatively privileged within backward classes. Educational institutions should also establish support mechanisms. Awareness programs on anti-discrimination are needed to eliminate stigma and promote inclusivity within campuses.

CONCLUSION:

Caste based reservation in educational institutions has been one of India's most significant social justice measures, aimed at correcting centuries of inequalities and exclusion. It has successfully increased access to education and representation for marginalized communities, contributing to social and educational advancement. However, challenges such as unequal benefit distribution, social stigma, and the exclusion of economically weaker groups from upper castes indicate the need for reform. The reservation policy, though beneficial, must evolve with time to remain fair and relevant. A balanced approach that combines caste-based and economic criteria, along with efforts to improve

the quality of education and promote inclusivity

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