

Reservation issue Hogging limelight in J&K politics

The issue of reservations in government services and admission to professional courses has become a political issue and it has hogged the limelight in Jammu and Kashmir politics. In fact one can surmise that reservations have become a political, vote bank and appeasement issue and it has marred efficiency and had given rise to inefficiency in administration and governance. At the time of the framing and implementing of our constitution, it was thought proper to give reservations to SC's, ST's and OBC for a period of ten years. But the irony of our politics and governance is that the reservations are continuing even after 75 years of freedom and self rule. Reservation has become a reality of our politics and political system that no party musters the courage to touch and scrap it again for vote bank politics. These days, reservation has become a subject of debate and talk of the town in JK UT. The chief minister Omar Abdullah has sought six months time to sort out the intricate issue of reservations. Jammu and Kashmir's new reservation policy has sparked protests and legal challenges. Critics say it reduces opportunities for some groups while benefiting others. The changes introduced after the revocation of Article 370 impact quotas for government jobs and educational institutions. Under the revised policy, open merit -general category reservations have been cut from 57% to 33%. The changes implemented have reduced the Reservations for Residents of Backward Areas -RBA from 20 percent to 10 percent. In contrast, the share for Scheduled Tribes (ST) has doubled from 10 percent to 20 percent and reservations for Socially Backward Castes (SBC) have increased from 2 percent to 8 percent. Reservations for people living near the Line of Actual Control and Physically Challenged -PCHC have been slightly raised from 3 percent to 4 percent. The new reservation policy also introduces new reservation categories, which include children of defense personnel -3%, children of police personnel -1% and achievers in sports -2%. A significant addition is a 10% reservation for the newly recognized Pahari ethnic groups, along with other communities like Paddari tribe, Koils, and Gadda Brahmins by the parliament at the behest of the BJP. Gujar and Bakewell communities, who were granted ST status in 1991, have

J&K Reservation (Amendment) Act, 2023, dated 15-12- 2023 ,Constitution [Jammu and Kashmir] Scheduled Castes Order [Amendment] Act 2024 ,Constitution [Jammu and Kashmir] Scheduled Tribes Order {Amendment} Act 2024 and recommendations of Jammu and Kashmir Social and Educationally Backward Classes Commission .The reservation policy introduced by the LG Manoj Sinha -led administration ,before the assembly elections early this year ,reduced the reservation percentage for the general category and increased those for the reserved categories in jobs and admissions .The then administration had approved 10% reservations for Paharis and three other tribes ,taking the total reservation under the Scheduled Tribe -ST category up to 20%.It also granted 8% reservation to other backward classes -OBC's ,besides adding 15 new castes to the list of OBC's as recommended by the Socially and Economically Backward Classes -SEBC Commission .The parliament in February ,had approved reservations for Pahari ethnic tribe and other tribes during the budget session .This reservation policy did not go down well among politicians and students alike .Calls for review and reversal of the policy were being sounded across the valley .While the NC MP Ruhulha had promised the students to join their outcry in November ,he clarified that the reason for the new government not taking any action over the reservation policy was because of a confusion between the devolution of power between the newly elected Omar Abdullah -led government and the LG Sinha .I told that there is some confusion about the distribution of the rules of business on many issues between the elected government and the other undemocratically imposed office and this subject is one among them .I am assured that the government will take a decision to rationalize the policy soon," he added. On December 10th J&K government formed a three -member panel to review the reservation policy in jobs and admissions .The panel comprises health minister Sakina Itoo ,forestry minister Javad Aminar Rana, and Science and Technology minister Satish Sharma .So far no deadline has been set for the committee to submit its report. Two days later, the J&K high court ,while hearing a fresh petition challenging the reservation policy, sought response on the same from the government.

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