

Assessing the Necessity and Impact of Caste-Based Reservations among the Dravidians

M. Hariharan¹ and S. Muthukirthik²

Abstract

In this study, the Dravidian community's need for and effects of caste-based reservations are investigated. Caste-based reservations, a measure put in place in India to rectify historical societal imbalances, have come under intense scrutiny and controversy. The Dravidian community, a sizable ethnic group in Southern India with a distinctive historical and social setting, is the subject of this study. This study's main goal is to determine if caste-based reservations are still required to solve socioeconomic inequities among Dravidians. To achieve this, a comprehensive analysis of the historical background, policy implementation, and current socio-economic indicators within the Dravidian community is conducted. The study identifies both positive outcomes, such as increased access to education and representation in government, as well as areas requiring continued attention, such as intra-caste disparities and the need for policy refinement. By examining the specific case of the Dravidians, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the effectiveness and necessity of such policies in addressing historical social inequalities.

Keywords: Ambedkar, Caste, Caste Reservations, Dravidians, Skilled workers

JEL Classification Code: H10

1. Introduction

Tamil Nadu, a state renowned for its educational achievements and a thriving automobile industry, grapples with the deeply ingrained issue of caste discrimination, despite not prominently displaying caste names. The historical origins of the caste system in Tamil Nadu can be traced back to various influences, including the Dravidian civilization, Aryan migration, and colonialism. Over the centuries, this system led to the categorization of people into hierarchical social groups, determining their occupations and social standing. Historically, low-caste or Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu faced pervasive discrimination and violence, with practices like untouchability relegating them to the fringes of society. Despite efforts to combat these injustices, including the Dravidian movement, reservation policies, and the influence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, challenges remain. While progress has been made, it is essential to raise awareness,

continue legislative reforms, and promote social equality to truly eradicate caste-based issues and foster a more equitable society in Tamil Nadu.

1.1 History

The caste system originated with the Aryans, who initially adhered to a four-tier Varna system. As they expanded into Dravidian territories, they forcefully imposed this hierarchical structure. Over time, this system gave rise to a group known as the Brahmins. During the Pallava period, between 200 and 900 CE, there was a significant influx of North Indian influence into Southern India, as a majority of Brahmins migrated southward and promoted Vedic learning. Between 200 and 100 BC, signs of social divisions were discernible in Tamil Grammar and classical poetry, particularly in the "Tolkappiyam" (தொல்காப்பியம்), which classified people into four groups: *Anthanars*, *Arasars*, *Vanikars*, and *Vellalars*. While these groups exhibit similarities to the earlier four-

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tier Varna system, it's important to note that they cannot be directly equated (Muthukumar, 2020).

In the Tolkappiyam (தொல்காப்பியம்), these groups are associated with professions rather than being solely determined by birth, and there are subtle distinctions to consider. For instance, the descriptions of Brahmins' involvement in secular employment, the possibility of individuals from other castes being warriors, and variations within the Vellalars caste point to a more flexible categorization. While these exceptions don't absolve traditional texts from their role in perpetuating casteism, they can be used to challenge individuals who manipulate tradition and religion to support caste-based discrimination. Moreover, Sangam literature, spanning from 400 BCE to 300 CE, documents the existence of at least 20 additional caste divisions native to Tamil Nadu, often based on similar customs or rural groupings. During the Vijayanagara Empire's reign from 1333 to 1646, new castes such as Kammas, Reddy's, and Naykas were introduced to Tamil Nadu. Even the Chola army itself had 98 castes categorized into two groups: Valangai (right-handed) and Idangai (left-handed), which were likely linked to specific professions (Muthukumar, 2020).

Subsequently, with the arrival of the British in India, the introduction of Christianity had a significant impact on the Hindu population. The British administration often favored high-caste individuals and Christians when it came to job opportunities, creating pressure on lower-caste individuals to convert to Christianity in pursuit of better prospects. This practice continued over time, and its effects are still observable today. However, it's important to note that while individuals from lower castes did convert to Christianity for social and economic reasons, many people have been hesitant to change their religious identity and have chosen to remain within the Hindu faith. This resistance to conversion persists even today (Muthukumar, 2020).

2. Review of Literature

Karthik and Vasanthakumar (2022). The study offers a clear and well-structured overview of the Dravidian movement's perspective on social justice in Tamil Nadu, emphasizing the inseparable link between economic and social justice, with a particular focus on caste inequalities

as drivers of class disparities. It effectively underscores the pivotal role of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy in shaping these ideas and disseminating the Dravidian political ethos. However, the argument could be strengthened by providing concrete examples and statistical data to support claims about Dravidian party governments' approaches to affirmative action and their impact on development indicators in Tamil Nadu compared to other states. Nevertheless, this study provides a comprehensive introduction to the topic and Periyar's significant influence on the Dravidian movement's pursuit of social justice.

Lamba and Spears (2013). This research explores the complex interplay between caste dynamics and government sanitation policies in India, specifically within the context of Rajasthan. It examines the impact of caste-based reservations for village chairmen elected in 2005 on the likelihood of villages winning the Clean Village Prize by mid-2012. This prize, which rewards villages for eradicating open defecation, serves as an incentive for both latrine construction and usage. The study finds that villages randomly assigned a chairman from a Scheduled (low-ranking) Caste are less likely to win the prize, suggesting that caste-related factors may influence the success of sanitation initiatives. This research sheds light on the multifaceted challenges faced by government policies in addressing sanitation inequalities in India and underscores the significance of considering historical and sociocultural factors, such as caste, in the design and implementation of such programs.

Kumar (2022). This article critically addresses the complex landscape of affirmative action in India, specifically the caste-based reservation system, initially designed to uplift historically marginalized groups but now facing challenges that threaten its core objectives. It points out the disparities between the policy's intended purpose and its practical outcomes, highlighting attempts to undermine it by discrediting the policy, favouring economic-based reservations, and recent changes like the 13-point roster system and the introduction of EWS reservations. The article contends that these actions are detrimental to the principles of social justice and equitable representation, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive reevaluation of the reservation system and a broader discussion on dismantling the caste system to ensure genuine social equality.

Rathod (2012). This study provides a brief overview of India's diverse society, highlighting its various religions, castes, and languages. It mentions the major religious groups, particularly Hindus and Muslims, as well as the traditional Varna system and its evolution into modern caste categories like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and upper castes. The study acknowledges the prevalence of reservations in India as a significant social issue. The researcher has provided detailed analysis and data to support its claims and explore the broader societal implications of these caste categories and reservations.

Balgangadhara (2017). This excerpt challenges the conventional view of caste-based reservation as a socially just policy in India. The author's astonishment at this perception serves as a starting point for a critical examination of the topic, highlighting that some in the Indian judiciary, academic circles, and the Ambedkarite movement defend this policy on moral grounds. The reference to the Patel community's demands and the moral questioning of their legitimacy adds a contemporary dimension to the discussion. However, the excerpt does not provide a comprehensive analysis, and it is essential to consider various perspectives and empirical data for a more nuanced understanding of caste-based reservation's complexities and implications. Nevertheless, it offers a provocative glimpse into the ongoing debate surrounding this significant issue in Indian society.

3. Research Methodology

In this research, the researchers have utilized multiple combination of methods to explore the impact and importance of caste-based reservations in South India and conducted an analysis concerning people's backgrounds and incomes. Furthermore, the researchers have conducted interviews, surveys, and case studies (qualitative methods) to delve into the subject more deeply. Data was collected from various locations in South India in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic, and obtained data from 32 individuals hailing from different regions of Dravidian land by utilizing Google Forms.

3.1 Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the historical context.

2. To measure the impact on marginalized communities.
3. To analyse the economic consequences.
4. To investigate the role of reservations in combating discrimination.
5. To assess potential drawbacks and challenges.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Caste Discrimination

Caste discrimination persists in Tamil Nadu, particularly in rural areas, where individuals from higher castes typically inhabit the central portions of villages while those from lower castes are relegated to the outskirts. This division extends to everyday life, exemplified by the differentiation in teashops where lower-caste individuals receive plastic cups, as opposed to the glass cups given to their higher-caste counterparts. Additionally, seating arrangements in such establishments often segregate individuals by caste, with lower-caste individuals not allowed to share benches with higher-caste patrons. These practices underscore the enduring challenges of caste-based discrimination in the region, despite ongoing efforts to address and combat this deeply ingrained issue.



Source - <https://tinyurl.com/2cjrnh2b>

Figure 1. Discrimination in Caste.

In many urban areas of Tamil Nadu, statues of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar will be found enclosed within protective cages. This precaution is taken because, during demonstrations or conflicts, there is a concern that individuals from upper castes might vandalize or damage the statue as an act of protest. These protective enclosures are meant to safeguard the monument from potential harm. However,



Source - <https://tinyurl.com/4bcpecp8>

Figure 2. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (caged).

in local neighbourhoods, where tensions may be lower, Dr. Ambedkar's statue stands freely without such protective measures.

Contrary to the perception that Tamil Nadu is a deeply caste-oriented state, it has a noteworthy history of social reform, and many prominent figures have actively protested against caste discrimination. Among these reformers, E.V. Ramasamy, widely known as Periyar, stands out as an influential figure who not only fought against caste discrimination in Tamil Nadu but also gained recognition in neighboring Kerala. Periyar's participation in the Vaikom Satyagraha, a movement aimed at challenging caste-based discrimination, earned him the title of the "hero of Vaikom." Importantly, Periyar's activism extended beyond caste-related issues; he initiated numerous reforms to advance the rights of women as well. His contributions have left a lasting impact, and his legacy extends well beyond Tamil Nadu's borders (HandWiki, n.d.).

4.2 Why Caste Discrimination?

The persistence of historic ideologies and practices related to caste in Tamil Nadu is a complex issue. While some individuals proudly embrace their historical roots, these connections can sometimes perpetuate harmful traditions, such as untouchability and caste discrimination, which persist in many villages and towns. Paradoxically, those who advocate for the abolition of such practices may still engage in them. This cycle of contradictory beliefs and actions has led to ongoing tensions and conflicts,

and in some cases, it has even fueled caste-related riots and the spread of unfounded rumours. Addressing these deeply ingrained issues and breaking the cycle of caste discrimination is a crucial challenge that requires concerted efforts from both individuals and society as a whole.

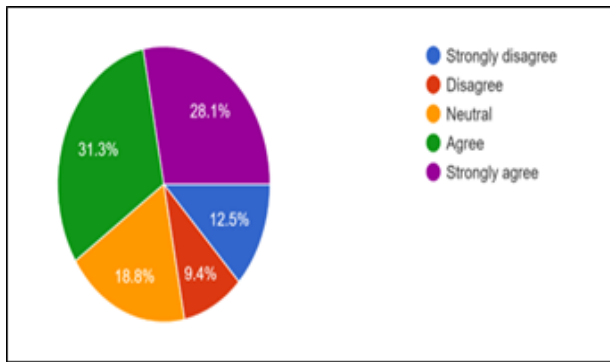
In Tamil Nadu, it's a common phenomenon to find caste-based organizations in every district, each dedicated to the welfare and upliftment of their respective caste members. While their stated objective is often to improve the living standards of their own caste, some of these organizations also engage in opportunistic activities, capitalizing on issues related to other castes to generate income. It's important to note that caste-related issues and conflicts are not exclusive to any one particular caste; both higher and lower castes can be involved in creating problems. For instance, some individuals from lower castes may engage in marriages with higher-caste individuals for financial gain, only to later divorce them or force them into unfortunate situations like involvement in the sex trade. These complexities highlight the multifaceted nature of caste dynamics and the need for comprehensive efforts to address caste-related issues and uplift marginalized communities.

4.3 Inequality based on Reservation

Caste-based reservations have long been a central element of India's affirmative action policies, with the overarching goal of rectifying historical injustices and advancing social equity. Nevertheless, these reservations continue to be a subject of intense debate. Supporters contend that they are essential for uplifting marginalized communities, while detractors raise concerns about their effectiveness and potential drawbacks. This research endeavours to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the importance and consequences of caste-based reservations in India, delving into the multifaceted aspects of this intricate matter. It aims to provide a nuanced perspective on the role of reservations in addressing historical disparities and fostering inclusivity within Indian society.

4.4 Caste Reservation

Racial or caste-based segregation is not necessary and is widely considered unjust. Reservations and affirmative action policies, such as those in the United States and India, aim to rectify historical injustices and promote



Source - Primary data

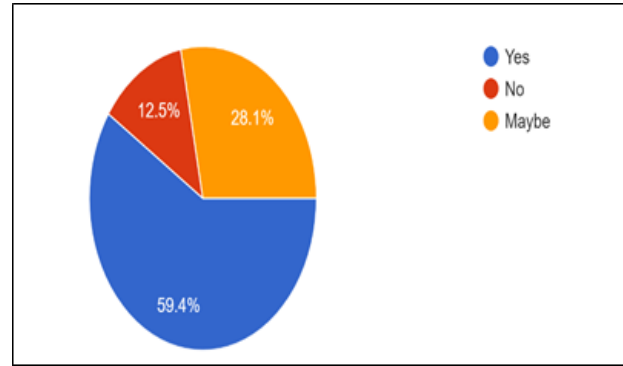
Figure 3. Opinions of the respondents towards facilitating reservations to people from all categories.

social equity by providing opportunities to historically marginalized groups. While they are intended to be inclusive, debates persist, with critics expressing concerns about potential drawbacks, including the exclusion of talented individuals from other groups. The ultimate goal of these policies is to reduce social inequality, and ongoing discussions and reforms are essential to strike the right balance between addressing historical disparities and ensuring fairness for all.

In Figure 3, we can observe the breakdown of perspectives regarding caste reservations. When questioned about the accessibility of caste reservations, 59.4% of respondents favoured expanding them to encompass all sections of society, implying support for a broader application. Conversely, 18.8% of individuals maintained a neutral stance, suggesting satisfaction with the existing system. Meanwhile, the remaining 21.9% of participants advocated for a more selective approach, proposing that reservations should be restricted to those truly requiring them.

4.5 Negligence of Skilled Workers

The issue of caste reservations in India is a complex and contentious one. While the reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) have been implemented to address historical injustices and promote social equity, there are valid concerns about whether these policies sometimes unintentionally neglect skilled individuals from other categories. Critics argue that such reservations can lead to individuals from other castes feeling unfairly treated or excluded from job opportunities. It's essential to have open and respectful



Source - Primary data

Figure 4. Response for the statement "Reservation neglects skilled workers".

discussions about these concerns to ensure that affirmative action policies effectively address historical disparities while also considering the needs and aspirations of all citizens. Balancing social justice with opportunities for all is a delicate challenge that policymakers and society as a whole need to address comprehensively.

Caste reservations have been a topic of heated debate in India for decades, with opinions divided on whether they neglect skilled workers or promote social equity. According to a recent poll, 59.4% of respondents believe that caste reservations do indeed neglect skilled workers, while 12.5% disagree. Another 28.1% remain undecided, highlighting the complexity of this issue. Many Critics argue that this can hinder the country's overall progress, as skilled workers may not receive the opportunities, they deserve solely due to their caste. Moreover, some believe that the quota system can lead to a sense of entitlement among beneficiaries, discouraging them from striving for excellence. This can create a paradox where well-deserving candidates are left out, and reservations end up perpetuating social divisions rather than eradicating them.

Caste reservation proponents assert that these measures are crucial for rectifying historical injustices and inequalities deeply ingrained in India's caste system, serving to level the playing field for marginalized communities. They argue that without such affirmative action, discrimination and disparity will persist, and reservations also promote diversity and inclusivity, fostering a more egalitarian society vital for India's social fabric and national unity. The 28.1% of undecided

respondents reflect the issue's complexity, highlighting the need to acknowledge reservations' shortcomings while recognizing their role in uplifting marginalized groups. Striking a balance that doesn't neglect skilled workers from non-reserved categories, while still addressing historical injustices, requires policymakers to regularly review and refine reservation policies, possibly integrating merit-based criteria to ensure opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups while not leaving behind skilled individuals.

5. Discussions and Conclusion

In conclusion, the research highlights the importance of caste-based reservations in India as a mechanism to address historical injustices and promote social equity. While these reservations have made significant strides in empowering marginalized communities, they also pose economic and administrative challenges that require careful consideration. Balancing the need for social justice with concerns about efficiency remains a delicate task, necessitating ongoing dialogue and policy adaptation to create a more equitable and inclusive society in India. Further research and policy innovation are essential to refine reservation systems and maximize their positive impact while minimizing potential drawbacks.

5.1 Suggestions to Overcome the Problems of Caste Reservation

6. The government must conduct regular survey to ensure that there is no exploitation of the reservation policies and ensure economically weaker sections are also benefitted
7. Educate people about the ill effects of caste discrimination.
8. Make sure we collect and share information about how well reservation policies are working.
9. Find a balance between giving opportunities to those who need them and picking the best person for the job.
10. Help people in many ways, like with their health, skills, and the places they live.
11. Ask politicians to work together and make sure the rules follow our country's principles.

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