**For Honours Course**

**(1ST Year)**

**Second Semester**

**Caste and Affirmative Action Policies in India:**

**Caste in India**

There are many other countries and nations that are characterized by inequalities including social inequalities but in India these inequalities are highly structured in the form of caste. Caste has existed in India for such a long time and has undergone considerable change but it still involves millions of people. Kroeber describes the caste system as a "system of social stratification, examples of ranked aggregates of people, that are usually rigid, birth-ascribed, and permits no individual mobility". In the caste system everyone is classified. The castes, like the system of apartheid and racial discrimination, teach us a fundamental social principle; hierarchy. They are the *Brahman*, *Kshatriya*,*Vaishya*, *Shudra*, and *Harijans* ranked in accordance of hierarchy. It is because of this hierarchal construction, with its rising order of opportunities and its sliding order of disabilities, which has been in operation for about 3000 years, that there was and continues to be an overwhelming majority in the nation that are socially, economically, educationally, and politically backward. These victims of entrenched backwardness comprise the present Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). These classes are generically called the "backward classes", but each class's nature and magnitude of backwardness are not the same.

**Reservations as Action Policy for Schedule Castes and Tribes**

The Indian government has a policy of compulsory compensatory discrimination which comprises various preferential schemes. The policy initiative most commonly utilized by them to offset the inequalities of society is a policy of reservations.

1. **The First category of reservation**

Reservations are a type of affirmative action whereby a proportion of seats are set aside for the previously disadvantaged. Reservations take place in the "Parliament of India, state legislative assemblies, central and state civil services, public sector units, central and state government departments and all public and private educational institutions. The Constitution of India provides for "reservations" in favour of two disadvantaged groups; namely, the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs). These reservations exist in the following areas:

1. In the state legislatures and the union legislature or parliament,
2. In services under the states, and
3. In educational institutions.

The constitutional provisions relating to political reservations for the SCs and the STs are compulsory. However, when the provisions were made obligatory in 1950, it was determined that this would be valid only for ten years, so they would last for a single decade only. However, since then the Indian Constitution has had to be amended every ten years to continuously extend political reservations for the SCs and STs.

1. **The Second category of reservation**

The second category of reservation, which is even more controversial than the first, is identified as job reservations.27 Job reservations pertain mainly to government appointments at union and state level and also to organisations which are significantly subsidized by the government.

1. **The Third category of reservation**

Finally, the third category of reservation is reservations in education. As far as admissions are concerned, it is possible that the different States of India may grant concessions short of outright reservation to handicapped persons, for e.g., the awarding of stipends and scholarships etc.

**Other measures**

Apart from reservations in educational institutions, other programmes for the upliftment of the backward classes include:

1. Exemption from school fees,
2. The provision of stipends or scholarships,
3. The provision of facilities like book grants, and
4. The maintenance of hostels, or assistance to hostels for SC students.
5. College scholarships,
6. The award of travel grants, and
7. A seven-and-a-half percent reservation in favour of SCs in merit scholarships,
8. Assistance by way of special coaching for the SC students residing in hostels, and pre-examination coaching facilities for SC students appearing in competitive examinations.

**Quotas**

Countries looking to implement affirmative action policies will do well to look at India's affirmative action policies, as India is the country with the most extensive quota system in the world, and it is a country where the government enforces these preferences. Quotas are enforced through this system of reservations, whereby at least forty percent of seats are reserved for persons from the SCs, STs and OBCs. It is given the name "protective discrimination" because the purpose of special or preferential treatment is not to award any special privileges but to give protection to those who, because of centuries of oppression, are vulnerable to get exploited despite the removal of legal sanctions behind exploitation which has been practiced so far.