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Spring 4-29-2021

Seventy Years Later: Caste Struggle in the Indian Bureaucracy

Kathryn Victoria Doner
Providence College

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Doner, Kathryn Victoria, "Seventy Years Later: Caste Struggle in the Indian Bureaucracy" (2021). *Global Studies Student Scholarship*. 30.

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Seventy Years Later:



Casteism in the Indian Bureaucracy

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

What is the composition of the Indian central services with regards to caste? How has it changed over time? What has aided and prevented the entry of Dalits/Scheduled Castes/ex-untouchables into the senior tiers of the bureaucracy?

CONTEXT:

Caste plays a major role in all aspects of Indian life such as where a person works, lives, how they are treated, and their place in society. Individuals from historically disadvantaged castes face extraordinary challenges because of institutionalized discrimination and inequality favoring caste elites. Seventy years after the implementation of centralized affirmative action, my research examines the changing caste composition of the administrative bureaucracy and the factors that have supported and impeded this change. The bureaucracy consists of four hierarchical groups (Groups A, B, C & D) with the senior ranks of the bureaucracy in Group A and low-wage workers, such as sweepers, in Group D.

METHODOLOGY:

I analyzed primary sources such as government reports and censuses for statistical data. The review of secondary sources consisted of journal articles as well as news texts from 1950 until the present.

FINDINGS:

I find that the highest tiers of the administrative bureaucracy continue to be associated with elite castes while the lowest ranks overwhelmingly employ laborers from marginalized castes for menial tasks (see Table 1).

- The lowest tier of the administrative bureaucracy, Group D, has consistently exceeded the reservation quota of fifteen percent for Scheduled Castes.
- Group C only fulfilled the reservation quota for Scheduled Castes in 1995 (Gool 2008:132).
- Fifty years after the implementation of affirmative action, reservation quotas remained unfulfilled in Groups A and B.
- Group A's percentage of Scheduled Castes is 13% in 2016; therefore, in the top tier of the central bureaucracy, the quota for SCs has not been fulfilled 70 years after independence (NCSC 2016:211).
- At the top secretarial level, there are 431 officials at the secretary, special secretary, additional secretary and joint secretary and only 28 officials belong to the SC category (Tripathi 2016).

Table 1. Representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the Indian Central Services

Year	Group A		Group B		Group C		Group D	
	No. of SCs	% of SCs	No. of SCs	% of SCs	No. of SCs	% of SCs	No. of SCs	% of SCs
1953	20	0.35	113	1.29	24,819	4.52	161,958	20.52
1963	250	1.78	707	2.98	84,714	9.24	151,176	17.15
1974	1,094	3.2	2,401	4.6	161,775	10.3	230,864	18.6
1980	2375	4.95	5055	8.54	235555	13.44	247607	19.46
1991	5,689	9.09	12,115	11.82	376,015	15.65	248,101	21.24
1999	9,535	10.77	15,424	12.13	362,799	15.84	257,289	22.71
2008	10,315	11.6	26,495	15.3	330,167	15.9	159,509	21.64
2016	11,333	13.38	46,625	16.03	Group C+D:		511928	17.76

Sources: Census of India 1981, Department of Personnel & Training 2013, Department of Personnel & Training 2018-2019, Gool 2008, Mendelsohn 1998, NCSC 2013, NCSC 2016, National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 2003, Verma 1996, Vivek 2018.

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Goyal, Santosh. (n.d.). *Social Background Of Officers In The Indian Administrative Service*.
Guru, Gopal. 2011. *Liberal Democracy in India and the Dalit Critique*.
Tripathi, Shishir. 2016. "With a Dalit yet to make it to the top of civil service, can Tina Dabi break the glass ceiling?," Firstpost , May 24.

BARRIERS TO ENTRY:

Casteism, the absence of reservation supervisors, and social norms and networks continue to hinder the diversification of the bureaucracy and a change in its organizational culture.

SUPPORTIVE POLICIES:

An extended age limit for Scheduled Castes, exemption from application fees, and the effort to fill backlog vacancies have aided the entry of marginalized groups into the bureaucracy.

FUTURE RESEARCH:

I plan to compare the findings from aggregated central government administrative data with compositional data over time from a single agency focused on improving the lives of socially marginalized groups (Ministry of

Social Justice and Empowerment or National Commission for Scheduled Castes). I anticipate the composition of the agency to diversify more quickly than the composition of the overall administrative bureaucracy. Furthermore, I expect to uncover practices, policies, and norms that could lead to a more inclusive central government.

NOTE:

For the purpose of the poster, I only included data pertaining to the representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs), one of many marginalized community in India's administrative bureaucracy.