ABSTRACT

The title of the study is, “Social Justice and the Policy of Protective Discrimination: A Sociological Study of Identification and Welfare of Backward areas of district Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir”. The study aims at investigating social justice and the policy of protective discrimination in Jammu and Kashmir with the areas under Residents of Backward Areas (RBAs) in district Anantnag as its universe. The study, besides exploring the origin and structure of RBA reservation policy in the state, assesses the process of identification, implementation and impact of the duo processes on the welfare of RBAs.

Objectives of the study

The study has the following six objectives:

(a) To study social justice and the origin and the structure of protective discrimination policy in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

(b) To examine the framing and implementation of backward area reservation scheme in the state.

(c) To investigate parameters on the basis of which backward areas for reservation are identified.

(d) To study welfare measures taken for the development of backward areas and their impact.

(e) To examine the role of politics in the framing and implementation of the scheme.

(f) To identify shortcomings in the structure and implementation of the scheme and suggest measures for their redressal.

Research Design

The study is exploratory in nature and follows inductive research strategy in its approach. It is based on both primary data (from the field-work) and secondary data collected from different government reports, handbooks, websites and departments.
Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique is employed in the study. The distance of the 2 RBA villages, one nearest and one farthest from tehsil, was apt to serve the objectives of the study. Furthermore, for comparison, one non-RBA village was selected from each tehsil, being adjacent to the respective nearest RBA village.

Sample Size

The sample size of the study comprises of 240 households of 24 RBA villages (2 each from the 12 tehsils) of the district. Two kinds of interview schedule were employed for the study, one for the collecting the information about the details of the sample households and another for the village profiles of the 36 villages (comprising of 24 RBA and 12 non-RBA villages).

Tools of Investigation

Interview schedule is used as the primary tool of investigation in the study.

Findings of the study

The assessment of the RBA reservation in the state of Jammu and Kashmir based on the process of identification, the policy follows and the welfare that accrues from the policy has highlighted many of its irregularities. The study has revealed the following loopholes in the process of identification of the backward areas:

- Nowhere, either in the J & K Backward Classes Act or in the rules, annual reports of the commission is mentioned that, what should be the minimum scores on human development indicators or access to basic amenities for the identification of any area as backward.
- The backward areas closer to tehsils when compared with their adjacent non-backward areas one some developmental indicators displayed similar results, suggesting thereby that besides socio-economic and educational indicators, some other forces manages the inclusions and exclusion of villages in the RBA list. For example, in these reserved villages, located in the vicinity of tehsil boundaries, the literacy rate is 47.25% which is similar to that of their adjacent non-RBA villages i.e. 47.30%, similarly, the ratio of priority and non-priority households in the public distribution system is 69:31 and 74:26 for these RBA
and non-RBA villages respectively. Also, the trend of the availability of basic facilities like electricity, drainage, dispensary, healthcare centers is more or less identical in these two sets of areas. Thus, it can be stated that that since there is no apparent difference in these adjacent RBA and non-RBA villages on the developmental indicators, therefore either the process of the inclusion of these notified RBA villages is faulty or the non-inclusion of the other set of non-RBA villages is unjustified.

- There is no or rare delisting of any of the villages from the RBA list, but the list swells up with continuous additions. A strong political force seems to be operational in the inclusion of villages to the list.

- Many media reports have shown that the areas of/around the locales/constituencies of ministers and legislators have got the lion’s share in the lists of backward areas.

Though the villages/areas of the district listed as RBAs have no doubt reaped the benefits of reservation as have their representation in some high profile jobs and their children have secured their admissions in many prestigious professional courses. Nonetheless, the pace of empowerment and development in these areas is far from satisfactory. The highlights of their socio-economic and educational conditions, as the study found, are itemized below:

- The average household size of the sample population (6.1) is higher than the both the national and the state average.

- In the basic amenities, it was found that these villages are lacking many of them. There are 40 per cent semi-pucca/thatched / kachha houses and a similar percentage lacks water supply to their homes. Only about 38% have proper sanitation facilities while as wood is the only prime source of fuel for about 27% households.

- The literacy rate (65%) is lower than the state (68) and the national average (74).

- The gender gap (31) is 15 percentage points more than the national average (16) while it is only 4 percentage points ahead than the state figures (20).

- From the 28.2% workers population, 45% are engaged in domestic work, 26.8% casual labourers and only about 10% in government jobs.
These areas have 69.8% non-workers population whereas half of the workers population is casual labourers. Thus, two-third of the population belongs to the income group of Rs 0-10000 per month. The areas have lesser numbers of workers as compared to the state and the national average.

The WPR of these sample households 30.2% is well behind the country’s WPR by 9.59 points while it lags the state WPR by 4.26 percentage points.

About two-third of the population belong to the income group of Rs 0-10000 per month which limits their expenditures on education.

The people from these backward areas have lesser land assets. There are 11% landless families and majority of the families (42%) have their land assets from 0-2 Kanals. Thus, the agricultural produce in these areas is far lesser than the other areas and thus they have to rely on the government supplied ration.

In the public distribution system, these areas have more 7% more priority households than the state.

Thus, the above socio-economic and educational indicators show that most of them are found to be lagging the essential basic amenities. They have low literacy rate, work participation rate, lesser land assets and are managing their lives in low incomes. It culminated to increase in poverty when these areas have 7 per cent more priority households than the state. Moreover, since the reservation is provided in employment and admissions in government educational institutes only, only a handful people from these areas have availed the benefit.

As per our findings only 22.5 percent population has been benefitted by RBA scheme in employment and education. Only 37 jobs out of 81 are reported to be employed under RBA category from which the high profile jobs that require high skill and competence like doctors, engineers and bank managers are availed by only 7 persons.

Similarly, in the admissions after the senior secondary levels in government educational institutions, out of 130 persons in 17 have secured their seats through reservation.

Among the 240 households only 6 households were having more than one person who have availed the benefits of reservation either in admissions or employment.
As per the findings of the study, the success rate of reservation policy has not been gratifying as the policy planners would have intended to. A non-uniform distribution of benefits has been observed through the study when the tehsils/villages closer to the district have greater share in the employment and admissions than the areas that are farther to the district. Even there is marked difference between the areas that are closer to the respective tehsils and those that are closer to it. Thus, the farther RBA villages are at double disadvantageous positions by being farther from the tehsils and from the district headquarters as well. The extent of benefits dies down to these areas when one moves from the center to the peripheries.

The study has unveiled many areas pertaining to the reservation of backward areas in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which can be further explored by the future researchers. A similar fashioned study in other parts of the state if delivers the similar results then the policy of reservation badly needs restructuration. The decades’ old reservation has shown no signs of genuine development and thus, the focus of reservation must be grounded on the economic position of a household which can incorporate all the possible handicaps of caste, tribe and area reservation.