

"THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION: PANCHAMASALI LINGAYAT AND THE CHALLENGE OF OBC 2-A RESERVATION IN KARNATAKA"

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Abstract

Focusing on Category 2-A and the demand of the Panchamasali Lingayat community for this category, the present structure of the OBC reservation system in Karnataka is discussed. By using the secondary data we establish the socio-economic impacts of the probability of the community inclusion in the OBC list; followed by the general discourse on equity, justice and politics in Karnataka. The research evaluates the social and economic development of the Panchamasali Lingayat community, examines past and present governmental policy, and analyses the consequences of the Panchamasali Lingayat being part of Category 2-A.

Key Words; Karnataka, Politics, Reservation, OBC, Panchamasali Lingayat, 2-A

Introduction

OBC reservation in Karnataka in one of the fundamental principles of the state's affirmative action policy, aiming at providing equal chances to the low-income population when it comes to voting or jobs or education. According to the identified level of backwardness, the system is divided into several groups. Targeting those who comprised socially and economically marginalized groups, it remains one of the most debated, and vital, categories of the reservation framework known as Category 2-A. The Panchamasali Lingayat community has petitioned the political bodies to be included in 2-A on grounds of the perceived negative socioeconomic status.(Lingappa, 2022, pp. 72–75) The Panchamasali Lingayat community has long been regarded as being backward but has struggled to gain official legitimacy within the context of the reservation system, which has generated a broad, legal, social, and political discourse. This paper explores the historical context, the sociopolitical context, and political status of the community's assertion to belong to Category 2-A; the importance of the same to the community, and the context within which Karnataka's reservation policy operates.

Background of the Karnataka OBC Reservation System

OBC Category Overview

The Karnataka government categorizes OBCs into different classes of social, economic, and educational backwardness. These consist of:

- Category 1, which includes 94 Caste-Sub Castes

The following groups are also covered, 2-A, 2-B, 3-A, 3-B, and so on.

- The second category includes communities that are socially less developed and which have a moderate degree of economic disadvantage (2-A). Groups suffering from problems and economically disadvantaged are categorized under 2-B, whereas other persons facing similar problems but with different social/ economic circumstances are placed under 3-B. (Lingappa, 2022, pp. 72–75) The Panchamasali Lingayat community has demanded to change its status from 3-B to 2-A. This demand even if it arises under a different subcategory has its origin out of perceived social and economic challenges within the community.

The Socio-economic Condition for the Panchamasali Lingayat Community

- The Panchamasali sub-group alone constitutes a relatively large percentage of this Lingayat community, which is numerically one of the largest and most influential in Karnataka. The community was in the past associated with products such as handicrafts, petty businesses, and farming. As per the latest socio economic census data of Panchamasali Lingayat stratum, majority of the cast populace is still struggling for livelihood problems chiefly in rural areas of the state with regard to availability in jobs or medical facilities. and what is even more important, education is still limited.

Social and Political Activation

For a change in their categorization, the Panchamasali Lingayat community has gone to the polls politically. The community's attraction stems from its conviction that: In the last few decades, there has been a rise in the number of individuals living on the periphery of the economy. Social mobility within the community has not been as fast as one would expect given the categorization of the community in the same economic status as other communities.

Category 2-A's History Among all categories of Karnataka's reservation system, Category 2-A plays a significant role. - So, overall, it provides the opportunity to get jobs and education from 15% Reservation 100 more caste & sub-castes categories than many other types. There are gains here for such communities which are socially regarded as backward in political terms but have more political power and a more cohesive feel. Thus, only the petition of the Panchamasali Lingayat community for reclassification as part of the 2-A becomes crucial for asking for a proportionate political and economic power.

The Inclusion Demand

The community's socioeconomic circumstances serve as the foundation for the desire for inclusion in Category 2-A: However, it means today there are still educational disadvantages as manifested by the lower enrolment in higher education. Many people are still employed as blue-collar or farm laborers; these jobs are typically underpaid, and wage disparities remain large. The Panchamasali Lingayat community would benefit from being included in Category 2-A in the following ways: Job and educational chances due to the state's quotas. Stand to gain political power as the community could be in proportion to the existing legislative bodies such as the Congress and other state departments. Criticisms by Interested Parties and

the Role Played by Category 2-A in Karnataka's OBC Reservation System The people of Karnataka understand this system better than most thanks to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) quota system, from which Category 2-A emerges as one of the most crucial segments. (Lingappa, 2022, pp. 72–75) This area is important because it impacts the society and even the economy and politics of the country with focus on people who are economically and socially insecure. Here is a thorough explanation of its significance:

The roles include: Empowerment and Social Justice.

Category 2-A consists of socially disadvantaged groups that face barriers towards finding employment, and accessing health care or education. Such communities in this category are afforded the affirmative action needed to lift them out of their disadvantaged status.

Reservations in Employment and Education: Citizens in Category 2-A can claim seats in institutions of education reopening the door to post-secondary education, which may otherwise be restricted due to social and economic barriers. This reserve also holds for government employment in which citizens of that particular community are able to get employment opportunities in the government, civil services among other government institutions. **State-Sponsored Scheme Access:** There are also subsidies, financial assistances programs and scholarships also exist in this category of communities. These reforms aim at narrowing social inequities and increasing the rating of pecuniary equivalence.

Economic Improvement

Economically they have been deprived and they are socially backward were presented under category 2- A. Because most of them engage in blue-collar jobs, farming, or businesses that offer them minimal opportunity to move up the economic ladder, the category's communities have always suffered economic marginalization. **Greater Income Opportunities:** It is also important that a number of critics found it that there is a great potential to gain a lot when it comes to reservations in government employment financially. Families are out of poverty when state-sponsored education opportunities and public-sector jobs are provided. The state has to guarantee that the subsequent generation will have the ability to have better opportunities in the economic area through improving educational and vocational opportunities. **Government Welfare Programs:** A number of programs that are availed by individuals in Category 2-A include financial support to initiate business and commercial activities, housing and accommodation, and health care services. This makes it possible for disadvantaged populations to steadily narrow the gaps created by those broad categories of the more economically endowed.

Representation in Politics

It is also quite significant for political empowerment related to Category 2-A. The communities get a chance to be heard in politics since they are recognized under this category. A community stands a better chance of getting people to be in the legislative assemblies together with other local government positions if the community is categorised as

being in a certain degree of backwardness. **Advocacy and Political Mobilization:** One of these tactics used political mobilization is the reservation system. There is often an increase in better political representation that leads to enhanced state and federal lobbying for the Category 2-A communities.(Lingappa, 2022, pp. 1–4) **Voice in Policy-Making:** The above communities may have more say in the kind of laws that affect them directly if the above-mentioned communities are better represented in the government. Consequently, exclusionary groups have their new needs met more so that excluded groups have their demands met thus increasing governance inclusiveness.

Inclusion and Social Identity

Thus, the communities of Category 2-A also enjoy economic and education issues in addition to the identity consolidation. It reaches the point that groups are able to claim their identity and fight for their rights when the government formally ascertain its backwardness. **Cultural Recognition:** Some of the Communities that falls in category 2-A are allowed to be a have their social and cultural heritage but legally they are allowed to benefit from affirmative action laws. **Inclusion in National Development:** It does this by ensuring that it integrates these special interest groups into mainstream development processes thus serving a very significant role in the development and growth of the nation. These groups' opportunities for visible participation in making decisions about the future of the state are extended when they are beneficiaries of government programs, educational reforms, and economic development projects.

Dealing with Past Wrongs

These have been socially deprived societies for generations, they have suffered historical injustices and the system of reservations as aressed through category 2-A tries to address them. This involves exploitation in economic activities, having a limited chance to education and caste discrimination. **Reducing Social Disparities:** Category 2-A has provided a corrective mechanism to address the structural injustice experienced by these groups over a period. The aim of the reservation system is to extend equal chances to members of certain categories in the population and to create equal opportunities. **Empowering Historically Marginalized Groups:** Category 2-A have prospects to break the chain of poverty and social marginalization for those who have been suffering from significant pathologies for generations. As a weapon it helps by enhancing the status of the poor by improving their access to social and economic mobility asset.

Reclassification Request to Category 2-A: Refusing their request would cement the Panchamasali Lingayat community into their current Category 1 status while denying them any fair share in the benefits afforded other communities in Category 2-A; the other parties admit that the Panchamasali Lingayat community is far more economically disadvantaged, less educated, and does not have access to state largesse as do other communities enjoying membership under Category 2-A. They passionately wish to change their status and be afforded an opportunity to education and employment opportunities classified under this

category.(THE KARNATAKA STATE COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES ACT, 1995, 1995)

Socio-Economic Benefits of Category 2-A: If the Panchamasali Lingayat group was classified under category 2-A, they would be able to uplift their economic standard since they would be offered more reserved seats in employment sub-sector and in the educational facilities. More political representation would also be provided to avail laws that would directly benefit the subject community. Let it linger that Category 2-A plays massively important under the OBC reservation policy of Karnataka. It offers a political path for making a political representation and economic and social development for the merged communities, which has been socially and economic left out. It is an important tool for equity and social justice as it opens a door of political activism, work and education to the underprivileged who have been locked out in the society. The Panchamasali Lingayat, thus, is subjected to a proper acknowledgement of socioeconomic status and historical troubles in addition to offering them a set of privileges belonging to the Category 2-A. Thus, the addition of new and improved Communities, which can be categorized as those fitting the 2-A Criteria, will not only serve social and economic benefits to the Communities but will also serve to do society a world of good in the way of equality. (THE KARNATAKA STATE COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES ACT, 1995, 1995) Category 2-A's Obstacles in the Karnataka OBC Reservation System and Socioeconomic Situation: Other Back's second category of education in Karnataka

Possible Impacts of Being Categorized under the 2- A List

More government scholarships available which means colleges will be filled more often. Openness of the public sector reserved positions which increases possibility of income mobility. The voting age reduction, which eventually leads to a growing number of activists who can gain a seat in state and local legislatures. (Lingappa, 2022, pp. 60–65)

Limited Economic Opportunity

Underemployment and unemployment: While these towns fall under the 2-A classification few people can easily secure a government job here. Individuals may find themselves in jobs that are not fully engaging for them, and more so they are locked out from better job opportunities. Underemployment is often higher more so in developing nations. **Income Inequality:** There is an indication that income disparity is still a feature of Category 2-A communities, especially in the rural areas. Most are farmers in that they suffer all the vices of the sub-sector such as low production, unfair weather shocks and lack of modern techniques in farming. **Data:** From a study from Karnataka State Planning Board conducted in 2021, to a category 2-A any community has a higher poverty level than the rest of the castes, more so over 43% of the households in the rural areas of Karnataka are considered to be living in poverty.

Low political commitment

While the aboriginal people of Canada and indigenous populations in All of India's state assemblies and municipal bodies are represented through the polling rights of reservation for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, Category 2-A populations often do not hold any significant political power despite their representation. It is the same with many politicians today who go looking for votes from other more 'forward' communities or the Other Backward Classes (OBC), but this political clout often does mean political might, or indeed policy win.

Discrimination and social prejudices

The issues of inequality, which are unconstitutional: Discrimination based on the caste system in Karnataka. The situation of members of Category 2-A comprises prejudice and social exclusion, especially in rural areas where caste endures in the communities' functioning. This social stigma has an effect on their ability to utilize government services, medical care, and education. Problems 5 that we shall see later cut across other categories. Items that may cause distress across other classifications: Within the reservation system, Category 2-A communities often jostle for positions with other groups. Since Category 2-A tends to be considered less deserving than Category 1 or Category 3, which may be economically or socially more disadvantaged, it results in contestation over rights to resources. The benefits that Category 2-A towns derive are even limited by this factor, especially given increasing reserve requirements.

Overcrowding and Overpopulation Within Communities of Category 2-A

Income and Employment Socio Statistics

According to the Karnataka Economic Survey of 2022, the average income per capita in rural Karnataka is ₹56,320; but primarily agricultural and labor-based rural households of Category 2-A earn less than this amount. **Agricultural Dependency:** While small fragmentary land ownerships and landlessness are however rife, agricultural production dominates in Category 2-A. Data from the Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Mission Report (2021) indicates that about 38% of Category 2-A Rural households lack land and rely on daily wage earners with low wages hence inadequate.

Health and Education Access

School Enrollment: Currently, most of the students from Category 2-A areas drop out of high school or are unable to get into higher education even with free secondary education in Karnataka. According to the Rural Development Statistics, nearly 62% of the students who belong to Category 2-A in rural Karnataka students drop out by the age of 18 due mainly to financial issues and family pressure. - **Healthcare Access:** As such, overall health is poor in rural Karnataka, and in Category 2-A areas especially in wealthier populations. The NFHS

2019–2020 for the State of Karnataka demonstrated that Maternal and Newborn demolition rates are higher in rural areas with a percentage of Category 2-A communities RTOS NFHSP.

Shelving and Basic Services

Poor Housing Conditions: Almost a third of the Category 2-A homes are not even connected to electricity and lack piped water or latrines or clean water to drink. Category 2-A has more than 45% of the rural families who have no proper sanitation and more than 40% still have no access to ‘safe’ drinking water as depicted in the Census of India 2011. • Infrastructure Gaps: Laborers have poor rights of way, inadequate roads, and no or limited access to electricity and this leads to the inability of laborers to move to urban areas where there is always better employment opportunities. About 70% of the inhabitants in Category 2-A live in rural settings, with 31 percent of these settings located in remote and still developing areas with less infrastructure.

Explaining Data and Socioeconomic Indicators

Based on data from surveys and other official sources, we find the following socioeconomic patterns in Category 2-A communities:

Socio-Economic Indicator	Category 2-A (Rural)	State Average
Average Annual Income	₹56,320	₹78,500
Poverty Rate	43%	24%
School Dropout Rate (Secondary)	62%	41%
Access to Sanitation	50%	76%
Access to Electricity	58%	90%
Landlessness Rate	40%	18%

(ECONOMIC SURVEY OF KARNATAKA 2022)

The above table neatly captures the existence and extent of social inequalities seen in Karnataka’s Category 2-A communities compared to the average in the state.

Reluctance from Other Groups

Some of the other backward classes that are already in the cat- 2-A are against this saying that the inclusion of the Panchamasali Lingayat community may reduce their opportunities to get the benefits and reservations.

This includes Constitutional and Legal Issues.

Other communities may challenge placement into this category through the legal process. Earlier, the Indian Supreme Court has sought to regulate quotas and re- categorisations saying that actual social conditions and research findings, and not influence, should be the basis of affirmative action. People under the Category 2-A OBC reservation scheme in Karnataka continue to face socioeconomic problems that emanate from the prevailing social inequality, and discrimination. These communities nevertheless currently have low levels of education, health, employment, and political power in spite of the advantages of reservations.

Conclusion

While affirmative Government action of opening up education, employment, and other opportunities to minority groups has addressed some of the problems in the past the need for targeted intervention to enhance the socioeconomic status of the 2-A category cannot be overemphasized. Some of these problems may be alleviated with more funding for education in rural areas, improved rural health care, and farmland reform for small farmers. Category 2-A communities would benefit from the state's quest to focus on empirical data to give more insight into socio-economic challenges and offer a window for encouraging the appreciation of developing more inclusive communities. The data and socio-economic analysis needed for this study are presented in the form of the research article and supported by some recommendations to enable Category 2-A communities in Karnataka to counter the challenges faced by them. This paper highlights how the Panchamasali Lingayat community being placed in the second category of Other Backward Classes for OBC quota in Karnataka comes with important sociopolitical as well as economic implications. Lastly, it is equally important to discourage competition between communities on a reservation to gain a better share of resources. This paper also clearly highlights the need for reclassification concerns based on the community's past economic exclusion aiming at ensuring enhanced political enfranchisement, employment, and access to education. Thus, the amendments have to be backed up by scientific evidence including planned socioeconomic studies and evaluation to make sure the actual degree of backwardness of the community is accurately reflected. The change in the reservation system has to be reasonable and equitable though which requires cross-communal negotiations, legal opinions, and consultations.

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