

Competitive Backwardness

Why in news?

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- A study analysed large-scale data from the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) and compared Patels, Marathas and Jats to other major groups.

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What is the issue?

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- The Jat agitation for quotas is back with additional demands for withdrawal of charges against those booked for the protests last year.

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- The Patidar agitation is on the verge of revival.

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- Maratha community reiterated the demand to be designated as one of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) during the second half of 2016.

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- Thus the demand by powerful groups to be considered “backward”, based on the narrative of deprivation and marginalisation continues to be a major issue.

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What is Competitive backwardness?

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It refers not only to more and more people wanting to claim backwardness, but also to more and more people claiming even greater backwardness.

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What are the findings of the study?

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- The study found that these three castes are closer to the socio-economically dominant caste groups like Brahmins and Other Forward Castes in their respective states on a variety of indicators.
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- These indicators include per capita consumption expenditure (PCCE), poverty status, educational attainment and occupational status compared to the existing disadvantaged groups i.e OBCs, SC/STs.
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- e.g the PCCE of the Jats is 33 and 43 per cent more than that of the OBCs and SC-STs and not different from that of the Brahmins and Forward Castes, Patels are 5 & 15% less likely to be poor as compared to the OBCs and SC-STs.
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- It found that Jats, Patels and Marathas have increased their relative advantage between 2004-05 and 2011-12.
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- Thus, the analysis shows that not only do Jats, Patels and Marathas possess an advantage over the lower-ranked marginalised groups they also have consolidated their relative position.
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- It also found that though the relative advantage of the Jats, Patels and Marathas in the agricultural sector is greater than in the non-agricultural sector, they still do better in absolute terms than the socially disadvantaged groups in the non-agricultural sector.
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- This indicates that the narrative of being backward is largely based on perceptions, and has little empirical support in the data.
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What is the reason for agitation?

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- This raises a question about the factors that underlie in creating and sustaining powerful movements, which have been sufficiently large and disruptive, in spite of lack of any support of data
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- Jats, Marathas and Patels are among the most powerful communities in their respective states.
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- Land ownership and cultivation have been their economic backbone.
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- They are well connected to local political networks, both within and outside their communities, and that this might be an important factor underlying their massive mobilisation.
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- These communities feel their power slipping away or eroding, in addition to feeling ill prepared to shift towards urban, formal sector livelihood opportunities.
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- They feel that the real economic power lies in the hands of the big corporations, and the state, overtly or covertly, acts in their interest.
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- Individuals or communities that feel strongly that the odds of economic success are stacked against them, are more likely to feel deprived.
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What should be done?

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- It should be noted that given increasing privatisation, the total jobs eligible for reservations is already shrinking.
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- Data also shows that existing OBCs and SC-STs are increasingly lagging behind upper castes in a range of material indicators.
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- In this context, extending quotas to relatively richer and powerful groups would amount to diluting the already small and shrinking entitlement for communities that are truly disadvantaged and discriminated against.
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Source: The Hindu

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