Maharashtra's Maratha Reservation Proposal

Why in news?

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Maharashtra Cabinet recently ratified a decision to grant reservation to the Maratha community under a newly created, independent category.

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Who are the Marathas?

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- Marathas are a Marathi-speaking, politically dominant community in Maharashtra.
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- Since the formation of Maharashtra state in 1960, 11 of its 18 chief ministers have been from the Maratha community.
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- They make up about one-third of the population of the state.
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- Historically, they have been identified as a warrior class with large land-holdings.
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- Division of land and agrarian problems have led to a decline of prosperity among middle-class and lower-middle-class Marathas.
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- Nevertheless, the community still plays an important role in the rural economy.
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What is the rationale for the recent decision?

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- Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission (MSBCC) submitted a report on the Maratha community.
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- It highlighted that the community was socially, economically and educationally backward.
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- It found that nearly -
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  i. 37% of Marathas were living below the poverty line
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  ii. 62% own small and marginal land holdings
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  iii. 70% live in kutcha houses
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- Compared to other communities, the study found educational backwardness amongst the Maratha community after standards X and XII.
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Is the decision justified?

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- The SBCC’s reported findings of Marathas backwardness do not go well with the available data.
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- As with Jats in Rajasthan and Patels in Gujarat, Marathas do enjoy a socio-economic status closer to that of the forward classes/castes in Maharashtra.
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- Besides, there is no reason to argue that Marathas face any social stigma that calls for affirmative action.
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- So the reservation demand is less an acknowledgement of social backwardness from a politically powerful community.
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- The relative inability to move up the economic ladder drives the sections of these dominant communities demand for reservation.
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- The lack of adequate employment opportunities amid a sluggish agrarian economy is a case.
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- So it is more a call for the accrual of welfare benefits to the less well-off

sections among the community.
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What is the quantum of reservation being planned?

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- Maratha community leaders have demanded 16% reservation but the government has however not taken a decision on that.
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- A Cabinet subcommittee constituted to implement the quota will fix the quantum.
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- At present, the total reservation in the state is 52%, of which the larger quotas are for SC (13%), ST (7%) and OBC (19%).
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- The rest being for Special Backward Class, Vimukti Jati, Nomadic Tribe (B), Nomadic Tribe (C) (Dhangar) and Nomadic Tribe (D) (Vanjari).
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- The quotas given to the Nomadic Tribes and Special Backward Class, in fact, have been carved out of the total OBC quota.
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What are the challenges?

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- **Category** - The Maratha Kranti Morcha, which led the reservation agitation, had initially demanded a quota under the OBC category.
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- OBC groups had been expressing fears that the new quota would include Marathas within the existing OBC share.
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- OBC groups have thus been threatening an agitation as Nomadic Tribes and Special Backward Class also have their quotas within the OBC share.
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- **Shares** - Meanwhile, the OBCs want their 19% share raised to 27%.
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- The Dhangar (Shepherd) community demands that they be moved from the OBC to the ST category.
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- Also, Muslims have intensified their demand for a 5% quota in the wake of

the Maratha reservation decision.
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- **Total reservation** - The Supreme Court had set the 50% cap in 1992 (Indra Sawhney vs Union of India) for reservation in states.
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- Maharashtra’s reservation is already beyond the Supreme Court cap of 50%.
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- Given this, if the demand for 16% is met, the total would become 68%, almost matching the 69% in Tamil Nadu.
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What is the government's clarification?

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- The government has said the Maratha quota will not affect the existing reserved sections.
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- It's because the plan is to introduce a new, independent quota, called Socially and Educationally Backward Class.
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- Also, the state argues there is no such provision for a ceiling on quota in the Constitution.
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- On the other hand, the Constitution provides for quota under extraordinary and exceptional cases.
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- This applies when a community’s backwardness is documentarily established.
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- Notably, the Maharashtra government substantiated the quota based on findings of the MSBCC.
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- So it will conform to Constitutional norms.
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- But legally speaking, Tamil Nadu's 69% reservation matter is pending before the Supreme Court.
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- Therefore, a final verdict on whether the state government can exceed 50% reservation remains a question.
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- Given all these, beyond reservation, the State should certainly address the prolonged agrarian distress and lack of adequate jobs.
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Source: Indian Express, The Hindu

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