Reservations Within Reservations

Why in news?

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The Union Cabinet has commissioned a study for establishing sub-quotas within OBC quota.

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What is the background of the OBC categorisation?

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- The Mandal commission in its recommendation in 1980 had suggested 27% reservations at the central level, for a list of the backward classes that weren't on the Scheduled Caste list.
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- This category was subsequently termed 'Other Backward Classes' and clubbed together nearly 5,000 castes.
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- The first central OBC list was a compromise between the list of OBCs in the Mandal Report and the various existing state lists.
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- The Centre has since expanded the list, often including newer castes to meet political exigencies and courting controversy.
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What is the crux of the current move?

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- As OBC is a group of castes, it was found that certain better empowered castes among the OBCs cornered the benefits for themselves.
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- This defeats the very purpose of reservations as many caste groups still remain excluded.
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- Inorder to address this, a commission has been recently created to explore the creation of subcategories for reservation within the central list of OBCs.
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- This is also in line with the proposals submitted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the National Commission for Backward Classes and a Parliamentary Standing Committee.
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- It is to be noted that, many state OBC lists already have subcategories and the system has, by and large, worked.
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- Also, there are no legal restrictions for sub-calssification of the OBCs on the basis of their levels of progress as per the 'Indira Sawhney judgment - 1992'.
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What are some sticky points?

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- While subcategorisation could go some way in bring in better social justice, it needs to be done systematically after rigorous scrutiny of the necessary data regarding income, education, employment etc.
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- Even the "creamy layer" concept, which was to make reservations more equitable has been ineffective, mainly due to pressure from influential sections for frequently raising the income bar.
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- Hence, the process must be effectively shielded from political interference.
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What could the political fallouts?

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- Creating OBC subcategories may force a reconfiguration of OBC politics and end the leadership role of certain dominant castes.

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- The reservation policy will be exhausted of its transformative possibilities at some point and the signs are already there in the Jat, Patel and Maratha mobilisations.
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- Electoral politics has always underwritten policies in India and it will remain so unless there is substantial growth in opportunities for all.
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Source: Indian Express

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