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# UNIT 22 OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES

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## 22.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this Unit you should be able to:

- describe what is an Other Backward Class;
- indicate internal differentiation of OBCs;
- have an idea as to the present composition and state-wise distribution of the OBCs;
- give information regarding OBCs and Sanskritization; and
- the politico-economic emergence of the Backward Classes Movements.

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## 22.1 INTRODUCTION

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'Other Backward Classes' refer to a constitutional category and comprise socially disadvantaged shudra castes. Castes located in the middle of the traditional stratification systems are the constituents of this section of the population. It is thus a social layer intermediate between the twice born and the untouchable. Put in other words it is a stratum of non-untouchable Hindu Castes located low in the traditional stratification system. Comprising a heterogeneous category these include some of the dominant castes of agriculturists as well as many socially and economically deprived groups are at least as deprived as SCs and STs.

These sections are educationally and occupationally inferior to the traditionally privileged castes. Untouchability and isolation were never their problem, their inferiority to the upper castes however used to be traditionally legitimised. Status disabilities afflicting them used to be inherited restricting their progress and prosperity. In a limited number of cases a few non-Hindu communities are also included under this category. Marc Galanter maintains that its composition varies from state to state.

## 22.2 INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION OF THE OBCS

It is therefore to be noted that the entities included under the term 'other backward classes' are not homogenous. The category is heterogenous. Sharp distinction tends to be elusive. Comprising section of society between the higher castes and the scheduled castes the description includes diverse socio-economic entities. Such social permutation on account of the diversities encompassing it remains a loose configuration. The elements comprising it tend to be differentially located in the stratification system and are economically heterogeneous. Land ownership remains the prerogative of a few selected castes among them. Distribution of land among the sections comprising it is skewed in favour of a few leaving the more numerous poor and deprived. Deprivations of the marginalised among the force them to work for others as share croppers, landless labourers and performers of traditional functional services. D.L. Sheth maintains that the category includes these deprived groups whose condition in some cases is even worse than the scheduled castes. The top stratum among them is constituted of the owner cultivators.

### Activity 1

Discuss the internal differentiation of the OBC's with friends and other students in the study centre. Put down your findings in your note book.

Lower to them are the landless tenant cultivators, artisans and service castes who remain under the economic and political control of the landowning castes. In past such marginalized sections among the other backward classes worked as forced labourer, domestic servant and palanquin bearers for those to whom they were dependent for their survival. Landlords used to receive customary payment from them on festive occasions.

## 22.3 PRESENT COMPOSITION AND STATE-WISE DISTRIBUTION

The other backward classes were reported to have 31.8% representation in the population according to the first commission for the other backward classes. According to the second commission for them that is popularly known as the Mandal Commission their representation in the population is of the tune of 52%. The following details the number of castes included as other backward classes in different states of the country.

TABLE 1

Number of Castes included as OBC		
Sl. NO.	State	No.
1.	Andhra Pradesh	292
2.	Assam	135
3.	Bihar	168
4.	Gujarat	105
5.	Haryana	76
6.	Himachal Pradesh	57
7.	Janmu and Kashmir	63
8.	Karnataka	333
9.	Kerala	208
10.	Madhya Pradesh	279
11.	Maharashtra	272
12.	Manipur	49
13.	Meghalaya	37
14.	Nagaland	0
15.	Orissa	224
16.	Punjab	83
17.	Rajasthan	140
18.	Sikkim	10
19.	Tamil Nadu	288
20.	Tripura	136
21.	Uttar Pradesh	116
22.	West Bengal	177
23.	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	17

24.	Arunachal Pradesh	10
25.	Chandigar	93
26.	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	10
27.	Delhi	82
28.	Goa Daman and Diu	18
29.	Laksha Dweep	0
30.	Mizoram	5
31.	Pondicheri	260

Report of the Backward Classes Commission (Second Part), 1980

It would be inappropriate to treat such groups as class. In fact these constitute aggregate of closed status groups. Status in such permutation is inherited and not acquired. It comprises castes that are prosperous and dominant but does not exclude those that are poor and deprived as these diversities are proximately located in the traditional stratification system.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Describe in about five lines what is an Other Backward Class.

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- 2) Say True or False.

The entities included under the term Other Backward Classes are homogenous

True

False

- 3) Which state has the highest number of castes included in the OBCs?

Tick the right answer

Karnataka

Haryana

Kerela

## 22.4 SANSKRITIZATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Castes located in the middle of the stratification system sought mobility by orienting themselves to emulate upper caste behaviour ideologies and ritual. In such endeavours seeking elevated status in the prevalent stratification system the aspiring categories were required to give up their traditional marks of inferiority especially such practices that were supposedly polluting. Such aspirations for cultural mobility tended to foster and traditionally ordained framework of the 'Great Tradition'. The low in hierarchy of caste in order to seek upward mobility emulates the life style of the traditionally high. This strategy for cultural and social mobility in the traditionally legitimised ascriptive social order is termed as 'Sanskritization'. M.N. Srinivas who used the term first defines it as a process whereby a lower caste begins to imitate the lifeways of a higher caste with a view to claiming a higher status for itself in the traditional caste hierarchy. Thus the claim is over a position within the caste hierarchy and is not a structural threat to it.

**Box 22.01**

Sanskritization represents the aspiration of groups to higher status and an attempt to prepare behaviour wise for such an event. In order to assert for such claims, support is sought of invented legends legitimising elevated location of such sections in the past. Shah has quoted studies to indicate that resort to sanskritization as a strategy for status elevation has found favour among the intermediate castes in different parts of the country. The Maratha the Sagar, the Dhangar of Maharashtra, the Kurmi and the Yadava of Bihar, the Koli of Gujarat, the Kaibartta of West Bengal, the Lingayat of Karnataka and the Teli of Orissa are reported to have adopted sanskritization as a strategy to seek elevated corporate status.

This endogenous and culture specific source of social change found favour mostly with the economically prosperous and politically conscious sections among the intermediate castes. Improved economic condition and increased political inspire low castes to aspire for commensurate elevation in other spheres also. Srinivas emphasises that sanskritization presupposes an improvement in the economic status and political strength of the group staking claims. Such urges are product of intimate rapport of Great Tradition of Hinduism. Inferiors in order to raise themselves up in the hierarchy have to be economically prosperous and politically dominant and assertive. Sanskritization it has to be noted facilitates positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change. It is incapable to change the system. It may further be noted that efforts at appropriation of "traditional symbols of honour" by those not otherwise entitled to it were opposed by those who constituted the reference model for emulation. Sanskritization however soon lost its sheen as it failed to reduce relative deprivation. Emulation of twice born status appeared irrelevant to reduce the inequality between the entrenched and the aspiring. Symbolic satisfaction mattered least to those seeking substantial location in the prevalent opportunity structure. Soft and conciliatory stirrings left the dominance of the privileged castes untouched.

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## 22.5 BACKWARD CLASSES MOVEMENTS AND THEIR POLITICO-ECONOMIC EMERGENCE

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The rise of the non-Brahmins under the leadership of crusaders against social injustice mainly from the intermediate castes represents a landmark development. It was reflective of a determined resistance to perpetuation of the traditionally legitimised inequality. Jyoti Rao Govind Rao Phule made the first attempt to form a Bahujan Samaj in Maharashtra to challenge the supremacy of the Brahmins who constituted the privileged few dominating the socio-economic political contours of the state. Phule himself a Shudra questioned the dominance of Brahmins in the colonial dispensation. His opposition to the caste system found articulation in his efforts to raise a new social order based on truth reason and equality. He initiated a movement to discard the services of Brahmins in the religious ceremonies of the non-Brahmins as he regarded them to be the unwanted middlemen between the people and the God.

### Activity 2

Discuss with friends and students the backward classes politico-economic emergence. Put your observations down in your notebook.

The non-Brahmanical movement was accorded institutionalization in the programmes of the Satya Shodhak Samaj founded by Phule. He considered Brahminism as cunning and self-seeking and condemned it as intolerable imposition to ensure the perpetuation of the high in the caste hierarchy. The "dominant agricultural castes" that formed the core and support of this movement subsequently ushered were very pro Congress. Phule's interpretation of lower caste exploitation ignored the economic and political contexts. Exploitation was interpreted in terms of cultural and ethnicity. Phule however stressed the need for return to pre-Brahmin religious tradition. Organisation and education were considered essential for attainment of such goals. He opposed the exploitation of Indian peasants and wage earners. Similar outbursts appeared elsewhere also.

### 22.5.1 The Self Respect Movement

In the south the "other backward classes" and the untouchable launched the self-respect movement to oppose the dominance of the Brahmins. In its infancy it tended to be a social reform movement questioning the ritual dominance and cultural preeminence of the Brahmins. It soon found itself enmeshed in the ethnic politics having its focus fixed on extracting concessions and benefits in lieu of its loyalty to the British. Such concern made it even unfavourably inclined to the independence movement as it was perceived to be the affair of the Brahmins. The Brahmins of Tamil Nadu who constituted the 'chosen few' to control politics, bureaucracy and professions constituted the target of attack of such forces. Unable to find accommodation in the Brahmin dominated social system the non-Brahmin

section in the population with the aid and support of the Britishers took resort to extensive mobilization of the lower castes and were successful in capturing power in 1920. Once in power the leadership made effective endeavours to seek a rise in their representation in other spheres of dominance. Such movement has a spread that included all the Tamil districts. Among its supporters were included the low in the caste hierarchy. The included intouchables to whom the movement had appeal. Initiated as a social reform movement to seek redemption from ritual dominance and cultural preeminence of the Brahmins it subsequently used its strength to arrange concessions and reservation for the backward classes from the colonial power and princely rulers as quid pro quo to their opposition to the nationalist movement. Success in ensuring political representation was followed by claims of backward classes for reservations.

Its leadership subsequently shifted its orientation to programmes promoting the interests of the middle and lower castes leaving the untouchables to fend for themselves. Such aspirations of the lower castes later found support of the Congress party that was keen to broaden its support by facilitating induction of the non-Brahmin elites within its fold. The non-Brahmin movement in the south tended to be more coherent than those in other parts of the country.

### 22.5.2 Praja Mitra Mandal: Karnataka

In Karnataka the caste associations of the dominant landed interest federated themselves under the auspices of the Praja Mitra Mandali expressing opposition to dominance of the Brahmins. Under the pressure of the forces that thus emerged steps to ensure adequate representation of the non-Brahmins in the public service ensued. Successful mobilization of the backward classes contributed effectively in weakening the hold of the Brahmins in politics bureaucracy and professions. The prejaksha that emerged as the replacement for the prajamitra after the latter's disintegration led to the further strengthening of the position of the intermediate Castes in general and the lingayats and the Vokkalingas in particular. The two castes emerged as the lead castes in the state politics after independence. Between the two, the Lingayats consolidated themselves more effectively in the power structure. Such permutation of power that constituted the other backward classes as its locus after independence oriented itself more seriously to take measures wedded to benefit the owner cultivator's interests. Legislations were enacted to facilitate transfer of land from the landed castes of Brahmins to the actual tillers of such land belonging mainly to the intermediate castes. The Brahmins of Karnataka were thus forced out of the village to find livelihood in the white collar jobs. The power equilibrium thus raised disintegrated subsequently in the wake of the emergence of the smaller backward castes who opposed the dominance of the power full in the intermediate castes. The excluded among the other backward classes resisted such dominance and organised themselves to emerge as strong contender for power.

### 22.5.3 Movements in the South: Andhra and Kerela

The Brahmins were opposed also in Andhra Pradesh. Their location as elite in the traditional as well as emerging secular stratification system left many at the margin of the opportunity structure. Perpetuation of the old and appropriation of the new by them found stiff resistance from those benefited through commercial revolution in agriculture. Castes inferior to the traditional Brahmin elite soon questioned their supremacy. People from these castes in support with other castes lower to them in the traditional stratification system turned themselves against the Congress demand for the Home rule suspecting it to be a ploy seeking to facilitate the perpetuation of the old order. The apprehensions of Brahmins preeminence led these non-Brahmin sections to oppose Visalandhra movement that had the aim of a separate state of the Telgu-speaking people of the Madras Presidency. The dominance of a few prosperous non-Brahmin peasant castes unwilling to favour castes lower to them prompted the latter on occasions to assert for their interest. The Munnuru Dapa movement and the Padmasali movement are examples of such assertion in the pre-independence phase. Individual backward classes associations federated themselves after independence to claim reservations. Such sponsored mobility of the deprived notwithstanding, in the bureaucracy the Brahmin dominance is not over and the dominant peasant castes on account of their economic advantage and political manipulations are poised to preserve their overriding influence.

**Box 22.02**

In Kerala the Izhavas led the intermediate caste movement against the dominance of the upper castes in the opening years of the present century. Appropriation of resources unleashed under the colonial schemes of expansion by the upper castes especially the Nayars and the empowerment of the scheduled castes with the aid and support of the mission distressed the deprived Izhavas who had largest share in the state population. Under the leadership of Dr. Palpu the Izhavas were mobilized to claim their due representation in bureaucracy and professions.

#### **22.5.4 OBCs in U.P.**

The intermediate castes or the OBC, did not emerge that assertive in non-peninsular India. Brahminism perpetuated itself in the sanskritik heartland of India the Uttar Pradesh drawing sustenance from the tradition embedded. In the pre-independence Uttar Pradesh protest against the dominance of the upper castes tended to be mild. Caste associations floated during this period in addition to foster inter-caste solidarity and inter-caste fraternity among the proximately placed intermediate castes were oriented to seek occasional redressal against the excesses of the upper castes. Thus in the annual conferences of the Yadava Mahasabha opposition used to be whipped against the upper castes. These upper castes were seen as exploiting and blocking their progress. The well off among the middle range castes found themselves favourably inclined to sanskritization as the strategy for status elevation. Competition within the stratum for superior location in the stratification system worked against the solidarity needed to produce an effective uprising. Situations however remained unfavourable to the rise of the other backward classes. They failed to mobilize themselves for effective gains. Consequently the intermediate castes remained appendage to permutations dominated by the upper castes even in the years immediately after independence. With the ushering of the famous Green Revolution and the subsequent emergence of the other backward classes as a political force under the leadership of Charan Singh the equilibrium of power favouring the status quo was disturbed. Fraternity thus fostered remains the locus for initiatives oriented to claims of equality with the upper castes. Success eludes such aspirations in absence of cohesion and mobilization.

#### **22.5.5 OBCs in Bihar**

In Bihar the educated elite from the other backward castes sought to federate themselves to claim elevation in their traditional social status by taking resort to sanskritisation. The Kurmis and the Yadavas especially those who turned out to be prosperous and conscious formed caste associations to usher reform from within and to exert pressure outward for improvement in their condition. Attempts to unite the powerful among the middle range castes were also made under the auspices of the Triveni Sangh that was sought to emerge as a federation of the Yadavas the kurmis and the koeris. Such initiatives on their part tended to be least effective as they lacked support of the upper caste leaders who constituted the locus of power. The leadership mobilizing masses during the freedom struggle thought it prudent to ignore them in order to serve the interests of their own caste who would have been losers in the event of such relief to this sections of the society.

Even the Kisan sabhas in Bihar ignored its proclaimed intent to help tenant from the cultivating intermediate castes as the upper caste leadership in such stirrings were opposed to it. Parochial outlook of such outfits ignored this. Independence and some of the measures of land reform triggered fall outs conducive to the rise of the middle range castes. Landlords from the upper castes lost their dominance as Zamindari was abolished. Privileged among the middle range castes asserted for their increased representation in bureaucracy and professions. Socio-economic development appeared facilitative to their social elevation, economic prosperity and political development. Sanskritisation however soon ceased to be the strategy for their mobility. Claims for rank precedence in the traditional stratification system did not find articulation as an effective concern. Protest against conditions of relative deprivation emerged to be the dominant theme in the ideology of the other backward classes movement.

#### **22.5.6 Education and Values**

Exposure to egalitarian values and attainment of higher levels of education provoked

awareness of the negative discrepancy between the legitimate expectation and actuality. This realisation of their dominant political status made them capable of initiating a process of struggle to ensure distribution of resources in a highly egalitarian manner. Appropriation of resources through bureaucratic manipulation that favoured the privileged upper castes received stiff opposition. The rise of the middle range castes in its wake has sounded the death knell of permutations favouring dominance of the traditionally high. The emergence of these forces reflect an endorsement to the strategy of allocation of resources, opportunity and honour in favour of the intermediate castes. However such sections among the middle range castes as are not so favourably placed in resource endowments tend to lag behind. Once important surrogate to upper caste dominated parties the dominant owner cultivators placed in the middle of the traditional stratification system constitute the locus of power.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write a note on Jyoti Rao Phule and the Bahujan Samaj. Use about five lines for your answer.  
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- 2) Discuss briefly the effect of the caste associations in Karnataka. Use about five lines for your answer.  
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 .....  
 .....  
 .....
- 3) Describe the condition of OBC's in U.P. Why were they not so assertive? Use about five lines for your answer.  
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## 22.6 CASTE CLASS AND POWER

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Thus the non-Brahmin movement may be characterised as the initiator of the process that subsequently led to evolution of a corporate identity among the deprived and excluded. Increasing economic differentiation seems to have induced the lower caste people to emerge as corporate entities of state claims in the emerging opportunity structure. Urge for the upper caste status in the status structure led the numerically dominant and politically articulate middle range castes to initially resort to sanskritisation. Unable to lift themselves form their intended location and eagerness for larger representation in the emerging opportunity structure produced from among the other backward castes such leadership that were best positioned and were well educated with fierce opposition to sanskritik culture. Low caste Hindus thus emerged for the first time as a political category. The opposition to traditional centres of dominance came from powerful rural castes which were themselves dominant. Once these castes and other identically dominant middle range castes in other states found themselves elevated in the power structure they tended to ignore those from among them that occupied the periphery. The ascending configuration were unfavourably inclined to downward percolation of power. Split soon ensued to isolate dominant communities from among the OBCs and claims for special preferential treatment for the marginalized intermediate castes were made. In the present structure of power the weak and marginal do not have chances for survival as an independent entity.

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## 22.7 LET US SUM UP

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Under the provisions of the constitution of India the state is required to provide special care to the problems of the weaker sections including the other backward classes. Special responsibility is placed on the Government to make provisions aimed at their protection so that they are capable to complete with those who had an early start and had done better in life and whose mobility was not restricted on account of their inherited deprivation. The provisions for their upliftment include reservation of appointments or posts in favour of the scheduled castes Tribes and other backward classes, reservation of seats in schools colleges and professional institutions and financial support to pursue studies. Such steps of protective discrimination are oriented to restrict the liberties of the privileged in order to provide greater opportunity to the underprivileged.

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## 22.8 KEY WORDS

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<b>Dominance</b>	:	Comprises vital, numerical, economic and political superiority.
<b>Other Backward Class</b>	:	Classes low in the traditional hierarchy, the most of all castes including SCs and STs.
<b>Sanskritization</b>	:	A process of imitation by a lower caste of higher caste attributes and lifestyle with a view to positional upward mobility.

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## 22.9 FURTHER READINGS

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Satyamurthi, T.V. (ed.) 1996 *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*. Delhi. OUP

Panandiker Pai V.A. (ed) 1997. *The Politics of Backwardness*. New Delhi. Konark Publishers.

Zelliot E. 1992 *From Untouchable to Dalit*, New Delhi. Manohar.

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## 22.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Other backward castes are a constitutional category and comprise socially disadvantaged shudra castes. They are a social layer intermediate between the twice born and the untouchable.
- 2) False
- 3) Karnataka.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Jyoti Rao Phule first tried to form a Bahujan Samaj in Maharashtra to challenge the Supremacy of the Brahmins despite their numerical minority. Phule initiated a movement to remove Brahmins from rituals of the non Brahmins and he regarded them as dispensable for their religious ceremonies.
- 2) In Karnataka the caste associations of the powerful dominant caste joined together under Praja Mitra Mandali in opposition to the Brahmins. Successful mobilization led to a weakening of the Brahmin hold in politics, bureaucracy and politics.
- 3) The intermediate castes or the OBC's did not emerge as very strong and assertive in U.P. The middle castes favoured Sanskritization as a strategy for upward mobility. The situation remained unfavourable for the intermediate castes and their mobilization. This situation continued even upto Independence, after which some political leaders have tried to make a difference.