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Q8(c)

How are Other Backward Classes identified. Enumerating the important features elucidate the recent changes in their social and economic life.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Linguistic and religious minorities and their social, political and economic status.

5.2 Linguistic and religious minorities and their social, political and economic status.

Core demand of the question

- Explain how Other Backward Classes are identified
- Enumerate important features
- Elucidate recent social and economic change
- Treat **Mandal**, NCBC, and the 102nd and 105th Amendments carefully

Revision summary

OBCs are socially and educationally backward classes other than SC and ST, listed for reservation.

Mandal's indicators and 1990 implementation, then Indra Sawhney's **creamy layer** and 50 percent ceiling, structure identification.

The 102nd **Amendment (2018)** gave NCBC constitutional status (**Article 338B**) and a Presidential Central list (**Article 342A**).

The 105th **Amendment (2021)** restored States' power to identify OBCs for State lists after the Maratha case reading of the 102nd.

Recent change includes an OBC political and educational middle class, internal inequality, and list-agitation; marriage remains largely endogamous.

Introduction

Other Backward Classes are socially and educationally backward groups, other than SC and ST, listed for affirmative action. Identification is a legal-political process, not a racial test. Recent change includes a larger OBC middle class, creamy-layer rules, and a constitutional fight over who may draw the list.

Body

How OBCs are identified

- The Constitution originally spoke of **socially and educationally backward classes** (**Articles 15(4) and 16(4)**) after the First Amendment, following **State of Madras v. Champakam Dorairajan**).
- The **Kaka Kalelkar Commission** (1955) was the first national attempt; its report was not fully implemented.

- The **Mandal Commission** (1979-80, B. P. Mandal) used eleven social, educational, and economic indicators and estimated a large OBC population. The Union implemented 27 percent reservation in central jobs in **1990**.
- **Indra Sawhney v. Union of India** (1992) upheld OBC reservation, imposed a **creamy layer** exclusion, and set an ordinary **50 percent** ceiling. Identification must be of a class that is backward, not a random political gift.
- Lists exist at **Central** and **State** levels and need not be identical. Castes, communities, and some occupational groups appear. **SC and ST are separate**.
- The **National Commission for Backward Classes** began as a statutory body after Indra Sawhney (**NCBC Act, 1993**). The **102nd Constitutional Amendment, 2018**, inserted **Article 338B** (NCBC with constitutional status) and **Article 342A** (President notifies the Central SEBC list, after consultation with the Governor).
- In **Jaishri Laxmanrao Patil** (Maratha reservation, 2021), the Supreme Court read the 102nd Amendment as taking away **States' power** to identify OBCs. Parliament answered with the **105th Constitutional Amendment, 2021**, which restored the power of State governments to identify socially and educationally backward classes for their own lists, while the President's list under 342A remains the Central list.
- **Identification today is therefore** dual: a Central list for Central institutions, State lists for State services, with NCBC advice on the Centre's side.

Important features

- **OBC is a heterogeneous category:** dominant peasant castes in one district, poor artisan jatis in another.
- Backwardness is **social and educational**, with economic indicators as support, not a pure income census (except **creamy layer** screening).
- Endogamy, occupational stigma or low ritual rank, and under-representation in public services are typical features used in reports.
- **Creamy layer** (income and high posts) removes the most advanced members from job reservation.

Recent social and economic change

- After 1990, OBC enrolment in colleges and presence in state assemblies rose. Yadav, Kurmi, Jatav-adjacent OBC politics, Thevar, Vokkaliga, and similar groups used both numbers and quotas (**Srinivas's** dominant caste meeting **Mandal**).
- Agrarian change, Green Revolution belts, and urban informal work split OBCs internally. Some are landlords; some are footloose labour.
- **102nd/105th** show that list-making is now a constitutional high-stakes process, as Maratha, Patel, and Jat agitations also showed.
- Private-sector jobs, contract labour, and the **EWS** quota (103rd Amendment, a different track) have changed the competition field. OBC identity remains strong in marriage and parties even when income rises.

Caution

- OBC is not a tribe and not a race. **Risley** types do not identify them.
- Sub-categorisation debates (**Rohini Commission**) exist because a few castes capture a large share of the quota.

Flow diagram

Kalelkar Mandal -> Lists of SEBC
Indra Sawhney -> Creamy layer 27 percent
102nd Amendment -> NCBC 338B Central 342A
105th Amendment -> State lists restored
Lists of SEBC -> Social economic change

Conclusion

OBCs are identified by commissions and notified lists using social and educational backwardness, structured by **Mandal** and Indra Sawhney. The 102nd Amendment constitutionalised NCBC and the Central list; the 105th Amendment restored State identification after the Maratha judgment. Features are heterogeneity, **creamy layer**, and endogamy. Recent change is political rise plus internal class split, not the end of caste.

Facts & figures

Mandal Commission

Reported 1980; eleven indicators of backwardness; Central 27 percent OBC quota implemented in 1990.

Indra Sawhney 1992

Upheld OBC reservation, excluded creamy layer, and set an ordinary 50 percent ceiling.

102nd Amendment 2018

Inserted **Articles 338B and 342A**: constitutional NCBC and Presidential notification of the Central SEBC list.

105th Amendment 2021

Restored the power of States to identify socially and educationally backward classes for their own purposes after the Supreme Court's Maratha reservation judgment.

Creamy layer

Income and high-office filter that excludes the most advanced OBC families from job reservation.

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