

# Revisiting Affirmative Action in Contemporary India

: In Search of Equality and Identity

Chuo University Maya Suzuki

## 1. Aim

This paper examines the socio-political situation of contemporary India. In particular, I explore the political aspects of caste by focusing on the issue of caste-based quota system, known as “reservation,” which is a part of India’s affirmative actions (AA). While AA is widely recognized in other countries, the India’s case will exemplify distinctive features shaped by the socio-religious structure of caste.

## 2. Data & Methods

I begin with the basic concepts of caste and caste system. They are characterized by highly structural inequality. In the second section, after outlining the legal provisions and policies against caste inequality, I attempt to clarify the pros and cons especially about the performance of reservation schemes for the lowest caste communities by critically reviewing the latest statistics, official reports and existing literatures. Lastly, I examine the impact on the beneficiaries and society from my field data collected in Delhi. The data consists of 17 interviews with recipients.

## 3. Results

We found that the performance of the reservation policy for the lowest caste communities was significantly low. The distribution has not been evenly shared among the targeted groups. Moreover, the results of my fieldwork observed that most recipients tried to hide their caste. However, they also affirmed it to obtain the benefits of welfare schemes. This paradoxical response explains why caste identity has become more positive and assertive, which leads to the politics of difference in contemporary India.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper concludes it is crucial to extensively examine the impact of the past reservations on recipients through nationwide empirical research. Such accomplishments have not been well documented yet. We must carefully evaluate and modify the policies when required.

## References

- Chatterjee, Partha, 2004, *The Politics of the Governed*, New York: Columbia University.  
Galanter, Marc, 1984, *Competing Equalities*, Berkley: University of California Press.