

Caste Politics – The ‘Mandal 2.0’ Paradox

Syllabus Relevance: *Caste in Indian Politics; Social Movements; Electoral Behaviour.* **Context:** In January 2026, following the Cabinet's signal to operationalize the **Justice Rohini Commission Report** in the upcoming Budget Session, a coalition of OBC organizations held a massive "Mahapanchayat" in Delhi. **Key Theme:** *Identity vs. Distribution.* **Keywords:** *Sub-Categorization, The 4-Tier Formula, Dominant vs. Marginalized OBCs, Sanskritization to Politicization, The 'SECC' Pre-condition.*

1. The Core Conflict: 'One OBC' vs. 'Many OBCs'

For 35 years (since Mandal Commission, 1990), "OBC" was a singular political identity. Parties like SP (UP) and RJD (Bihar) built empires on this consolidated block.

- **The Disruption (Jan 2026):** The Rohini Commission (Sub-categorization) threatens to shatter this unity. It argues that **97% of the quota benefits** have been cornered by just **25% of the castes** (Dominant OBCs like Yadavs, Kurmis, Jats).
- **The Paradox:** The "Mandal 1.0" era united the OBCs to fight the Upper Castes. The "Mandal 2.0" era (2026 onwards) is pitting **OBCs against OBCs** (Dominant vs. MBCs).

2. The '4-Tier' Formula

The Commission has proposed splitting the 27% quota into four bands to ensure the "Most Backward" get a guaranteed share:

- **Tier 1 (Dominant):** 2% quota (for the 1,674 castes who are relatively affluent).
- **Tier 2:** 6% quota.
- **Tier 3:** 9% quota.
- **Tier 4 (Extremely Backward):** 10% quota (for the 97 castes who have zero representation).
- **Political Implication:** This is a "Divide and Rule" masterstroke. By prioritizing Tier 3 and 4, the ruling party (BJP) aims to woo the non-dominant OBCs (who feel cheated by Yadav/Jat dominance), effectively neutralizing the opposition's core vote bank.

3. The Jan 2026 Counter-Move: 'No Data, No Division'

The dominant OBC groups reacted sharply in January.

- **The Mahapanchayat Demand:** Their slogan is "*Jitni Abadi, Utna Haq*" (Rights proportional to population). They argue that you cannot divide the pie (27%) without knowing the size of the hunger (Population).
- **The SECC Trigger:** They demanded a fresh **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC)** before any sub-categorization. Their calculation: A census might show OBCs are **50%+ of the population**, forcing the government to breach the **50% Indra Sawhney cap** and increase the *total* quota before splitting it.

4. Theoretical Framework: Politicization of Caste

- **Rajni Kothari's Thesis:** Caste is not disappearing; it is taking on a new *secular* form. Sub-categorization transforms caste from a *ritual hierarchy* to an *interest group*.

- **M.N. Srinivas's Update:** We are seeing a reversal of "Sanskritization." Earlier, lower castes wanted to be like upper castes. Now, due to sub-categorization, castes are competing to be labeled *more backward* (Tier 4) to gain state benefits. This is "**De-Sanskritization**" for political utility.

5. Conclusion: The Fracture of the 'Bahujan'

The events of Jan 2026 signal the end of the "Bahujan" (Majority) as a cohesive political force.

- **Future Trend:** Indian politics is moving towards "**Micro-Caste Management.**" Parties will no longer have "OBC Wings"; they will have specific cells for *Vishwakarmas, Kushwahas, and Rajbhars*, negotiating separate deals with each sub-group.