

# Decoding the Maratha claim for reservations

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By Sumeet Mhaskar

## Given the mushrooming demand for quotas by dominant communities, there is a need to evaluate these demands using logic and cold hard facts

A fresh mobilisation by Marathas for reservation in higher education and public employment has roiled Maharashtra for the last three months and sparked counter-protests by Other Backward Classes (OBC) groups, which remain opposed to including the dominant community within the backward bracket. The demands have cast a long shadow on the state's politics and are likely to influence the upcoming elections. The ongoing winter session of the assembly is expected to take a call on the fractious issue.

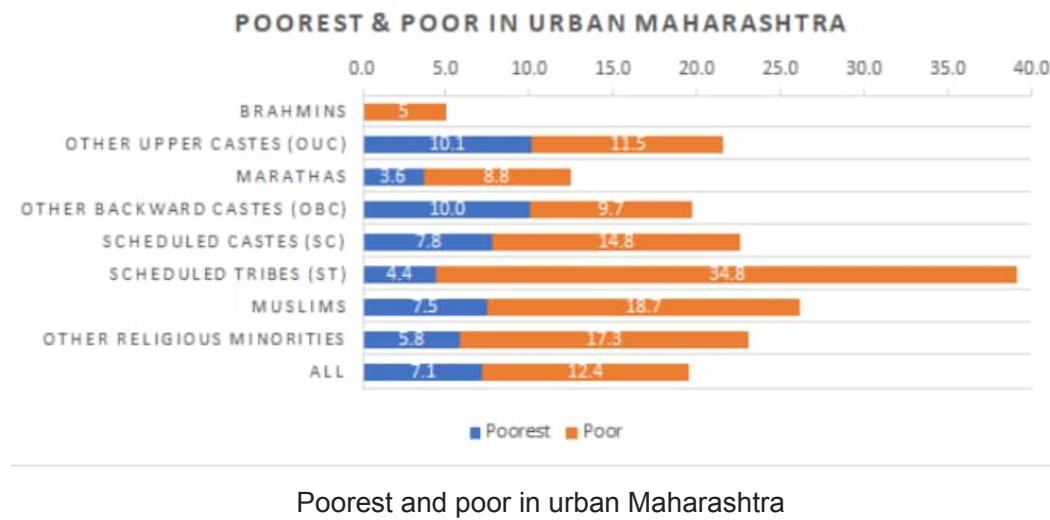


Within Pune and other cities, additional security has been provided to Maratha MLAs and political leaders based on intelligence inputs that they may be targeted. (HT PHOTO)

Since the protests first began in 2016, the Marathas have argued that the absence of reservation has held their community behind. The absence of caste-specific data in income, education and employment makes it challenging to analyse such claims. But a workaround can be achieved by data from the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) -II survey 2011-12. An analysis of this data holds takeaways not just for the Maratha quota protests but also for similar demands made by other dominant communities across north India.

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First the basics. The Maharashtra population IHDS-II surveyed includes 32.8% OBCs, 26.6% Marathas, 9.7% Scheduled Castes (SCs), 9.3% Scheduled Tribes (STs), 6.6% other upper castes (OUCs), 5.8% Muslims and 1.8% Brahmins. The biggest chunk of STs live in rural areas, while the majority of Brahmins and OUCs live in cities. Around 70% of Marathas and OBCs reside in rural areas. More than half of Muslims and about 45% of SCs live in urban areas.

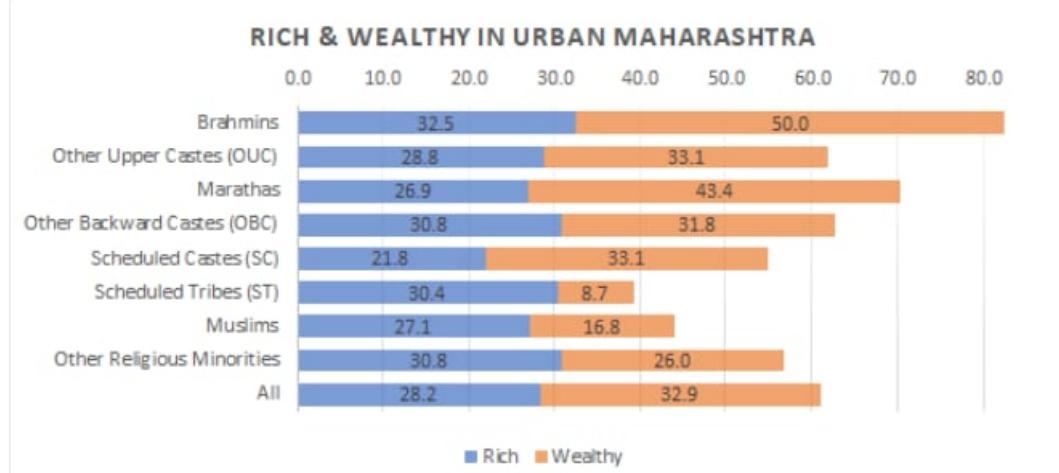


In urban Maharashtra, about 70% Maratha households fall in rich and wealthy income groups and 17.3% in middle-income groups. Only 12.4% Maratha households fall in the poorest and poor income levels – a number that is only behind Brahmins. Among the rich and wealthy, again, only Brahmins (82%) fare better. Thus, urban Marathas are clearly well off with only a tiny proportion of their households falling in the poorest brackets.

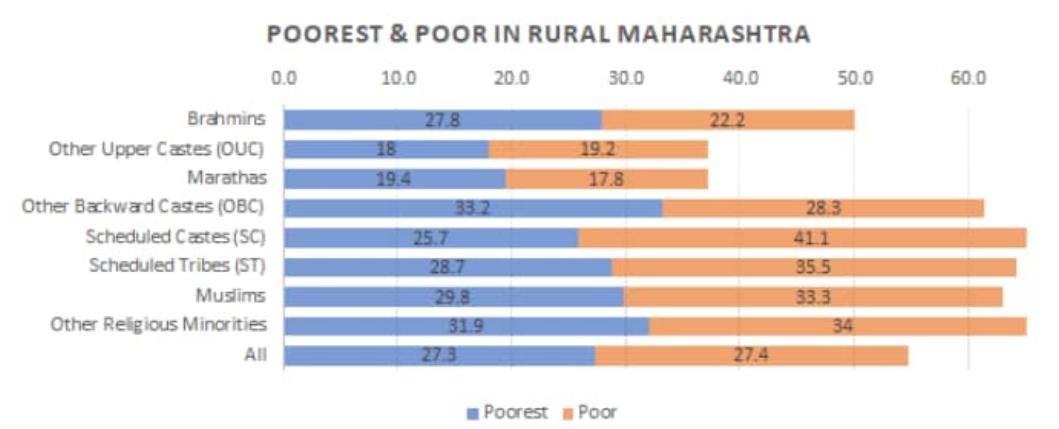
Then what's the problem? The answer lies in the middle-income category – where OBCs (17.65%) have a similar share as the Marathas, but more Muslims (29.9%), SCs (22.5%) and STs (21.7%) make the cut. This may be at the root of the anxiety among protesting Marathas, who interpret the mobility among these groups due to the reservation availed by them.

Of all rural Maratha households, about 37.2% fall in the poorest and poor income groups, 42.2% in the rich and wealthy category, and 20.6 % in the middle-income bracket.

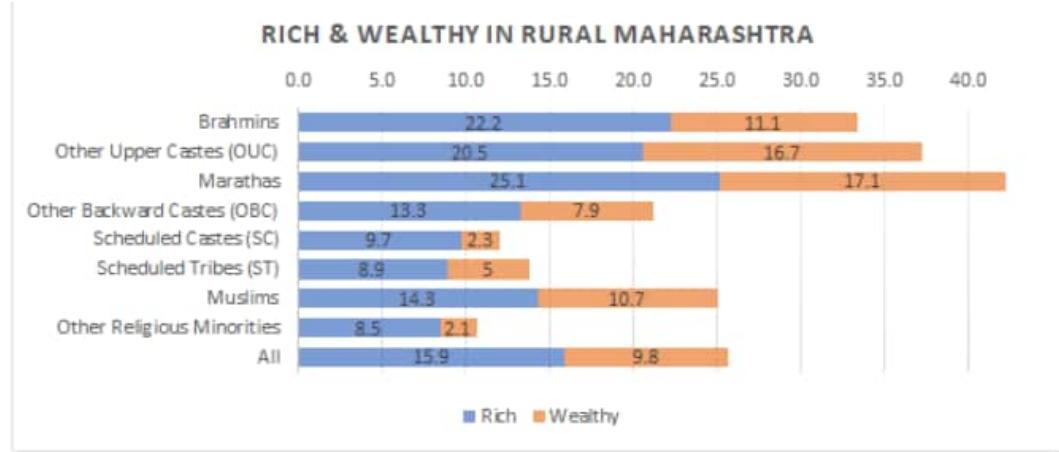
Rural Marathas have fewer households in the bottom rung than even Brahmins (50%). In fact, among all social groups, the proportion of Marathas is the lowest among the poorest and poor, and highest among the rich and wealthy (42.2%). Rural Marathas, therefore, perform extremely well at both ends of the income spectrum.



Rich and wealthy in urban Maharashtra



Poorest and poor in rural Maharashtra

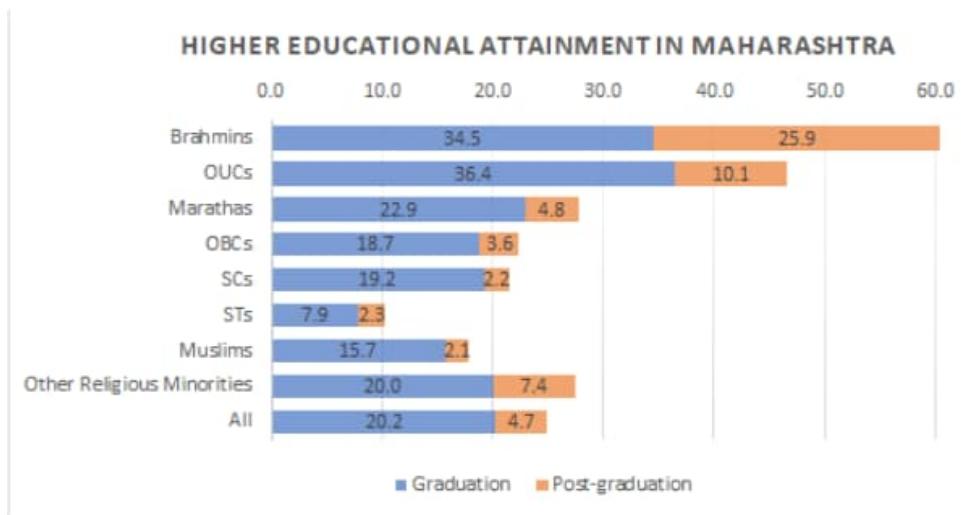


Rich and wealthy in rural Maharashtra

In terms of educational attainment, about 22.9% of Marathas are graduates and 4.8% are postgraduates. Behind them are OBCs (18.7% and 3.6%), SCs (19.2% and 2.2%), STs (7.9% and 2.3%) and Muslims (15.7% and 2.09%). Only Brahmins (34.5% and 25.9%), and

other upper castes (36.4% and 10.1%) are ahead of Marathas. It is also striking to note that despite having a larger proportion of families in the rich and wealthy income groups, Marathas lag in higher education.

In public employment, the Gaikwad Commission report shows that the Marathas occupy 33.23%, 29.03%, 37.06%, and 36.53% of the open-category positions in Grades A, B, C and D, respectively. Of the total open category posts in the Mantralaya (state secretariat), the Marathas occupy 37.5%, 52.33%, 52.1%, and 55.55% positions in Grades A, B, C and D, respectively. Across the bureaucracy in Maharashtra, the share of the Marathas is 15.52% in the Indian Administrative Services, 27.85% in the Indian Police Services, and 17.97% in the Indian Foreign Services, according to the Gaikwad Commission report. IHDS-II data shows us that among the Marathas, 2.06% are in professional occupations — behind Brahmins (25.9%), other upper castes (8.29%), and OBCs (3.5%). However, in clerical occupations, among the Marathas, 6.08% are found engaged in this occupation, ahead of OBCs, SCs, and STs.



Higher education attainment in Maharashtra

The findings demonstrate that despite no reservation benefits, the Marathas have performed extremely well across urban and rural regions, only lagging Brahmins and other upper castes in some parameters. They are dominant and wealthy, with significant representation in public employment, indicating that there is no barrier for the community to avail of jobs and education. In terms of education too, Marathas perform well. An exhaustive caste-based survey is only likely to bear out these trends across the state and show that a lack of reservation has not acted as an obstacle for the community.

Maratha reservations have been enacted twice before, only to falter before the courts. It remains unclear whether the state government will finally extend reservations to the community this time. But whatever the political eventuality, given the mushrooming demand for quotas by dominant communities that is only likely to exacerbate before the 2024 polls, there is a need to evaluate these demands using logic and cold hard facts.

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