

5. Assam to Grant ST Status to 6 Communities – Polity

Trouble brews in Assam– Scheduled Tribes warn of widespread agitation after report recommends ST status to 6 more communities. An Assam Group of Ministers (GoM) has recommended granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six OBC communities (including Tai Ahom and Tea Tribes) by creating a new "ST (Valley)" category. This three-tier classification aims to accommodate the new groups without diluting the existing quotas for ST (Plains) and ST (Hills).

Overview of the Issue

Core Development– A Group of Ministers (GoM) report has been tabled in the Assam Assembly. It recommends full justification for granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities that are currently listed as Other Backward Classes (OBC).

The Six Communities

1. Tai Ahom
2. Tea Tribes/Adivasis
3. Moran
4. Motok
5. Chutia
6. Koch-Rajbongshi

Demographic Significance– Together, these six communities constitute approximately 27% of Assam's total population. They are currently categorized under OBC/MOBC (More Other Backward Classes).

Background and Mandate of the GoM

Formation– The GoM was constituted following directions from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in 2019. It has been reconstituted twice since its inception.

Specific Objectives–

1. **Reservation Quantum–** To determine the specific quantum of reservation for these six communities.
2. **Revised OBC Status–** To suggest a revised reservation structure for the remaining OBCs once these six groups are moved to the ST category.
3. **Safeguards–** To recommend measures to protect the rights of the existing ST (Plains) and ST (Hills) communities, ensuring their quota is not diluted.

Key Recommendation– Three-Tier ST Classification

The GoM has proposed a major structural change in how Scheduled Tribes are classified in Assam to accommodate the new groups without disturbing the existing ones.

Proposed New Category Structure– Currently, Assam has two ST categories– ST (Plains) and ST (Hills). The GoM recommends creating a third, new category called ST (Valley).

Beneficiaries of the New Category–

ST (Valley)– This category is recommended for the Tai Ahom, Chutia, Tea Tribes/Adivasis, and Koch-Rajbongshi (excluding those in undivided Goalpara).

Existing Categories remain unchanged– ST (Plains)– Covers groups like Bodos, Mishings, etc. ST (Hills)– Covers groups like Karbis, Dimasas, etc.

Reservation Allocation– Existing ST (Plains) currently have 10% reservation. Existing ST (Hills) currently have 5% reservation. The new ST (Valley) will receive a reservation percentage determined specifically based on their population numbers.

Mechanism for Reservation

To ensure that the new inclusion does not cause conflict with existing tribes, the GoM proposed specific mechanisms–

State-Level Separation (Distinct Rosters)– The new ST (Valley) category will have its own independent reservation quotas. They will have separate vacancy registers and rosters for all state government jobs and admission into educational institutions.

Implication– They will *not* eat into the share of existing ST (Plains) or ST (Hills).

Central-Level Integration– At the national level, this three-tier distinction (Plains/Hills/Valley) does not

exist. Therefore, for Central Government jobs, all groups must compete under the single common ST category.

Political Representation (Parliamentary & Assembly)

Protection of Existing Seats- The seats of Kokrajhar (currently reserved for ST-Plains) and Diphu (currently reserved for ST-Hills) must be protected.

Recommendation- These seats should be permanently reserved for ST(P) and ST(H) respectively through a specific constitutional amendment.

Creation of New Seats- The inclusion of the six communities will significantly increase the total ST population of the state.

Recommendation- Additional parliamentary and assembly seats must be reserved specifically for the new ST (Valley) constituents to reflect their population numbers.

Interim Measures (Transitional Phase)

Recognizing that the formal grant of ST status is a lengthy constitutional process, the GoM suggested immediate interim measures-

Sub-Categorisation of OBCs- The existing 27% OBC reservation should be divided.

Structure- Seven distinct sub-categories.

Six sub-categories- One for each of the six communities seeking ST status.

One sub-category- For the remaining OBC communities.

Pro-Rata Reservation- Each of these sub-groups should receive reservation strictly based on their population size.

Requirement- A **socio-economic survey** and census/enumeration must be conducted to determine these numbers accurately.

Local Body Representation- These groups should be granted specific reservations in Panchayats, Municipal bodies, and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

Land Protection Law- To prevent land alienation, the State Government is advised to enact a specific law.

Objective- Restrict the transfer of land held by these six communities (and existing STs) to "outsiders" or non-protected groups.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/trouble-breeds-in-assam-scheduled-tribes-warn-of-widespread-agitation-after-report-recommends-st-status-to-6-more-communities-10394982/>