CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAM
PRE-CUM-MAINS 2024
NOV 2023: BOOKLET-2

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1. GS-2

1) SUBCATEGORIZATION OF OBCS

- **Why in news?**
  - » OBC and subcategories: Why this has been a hot-button issue for long (Oct 2023: Source: IE)

- **Introduction:**
  - » **OBCs,** the beneficiaries of 27% reservation in central government jobs, are not a monolith. Within the OBC are hundreds of castes, all at different level of marginalization.
  - » A perception has developed that some dominant groups in OBCs are reaping the benefits and advantages of reservation whereas the very marginalized groups are not able to reap the benefits. Therefore, a demand for subcategorization and sub-reservation within the OBC community emerges.
    - It should be noted that **some states** like Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and WB etc. already have such kind of subcategorization.

- **Past Commissions and their recommendations about Subcategorization:**
  - i. **First OBC Commission** headed by Kaka Kalelkar was constituted in 1953 during the time of Jawaharlal Nehru's government. It submitted its report in 1955.
    - » This commission prepared a list of **2,399 backward castes** in the country and categorized **837** of them as "**most backwar**d".
    - » This report was never discussed in the Parliament and never implemented.
  - ii. **Second OBC Commission: BP Mandal Commission**: It was appointed by 1979 **Morarji Desai's Janta government**, but its implementation was announced only in 1990 by VP Singh Government.
    - » Here **no subcategorization was recognized**; But one of the members**,** L R Naik had said in is dissent that OBCs should be split into intermediate backward classes and depressed backward classes.
  - iii. **In Feb 2014, the NCBC examined the issue of subcategorization** which in its report suggested that OBCs should be subcategorized into Extremely Backward Classes, More Backward Classes and Backward Classes. This recommendation was **not implemented**.

- **In Oct 2017 a new Commission for Subcategorization of OBCs was constituted** under the chairpersonship of **Justice G Rohini**, a retired judge of Delhi High Court.
  - » It's original tenure of 12 weeks was extended 14 times till it submitted its report on 31st July 2023. This report hasn't been made public yet.
  - » **Terms of Reference**: Originally, it had three terms of reference.
    - Examining the **extent of inequitable distribution o**f benefit of reservation among different castes of OBCs in the Central List.
    - Develop a **scientific criteria/mechanisms/parameters for subcategorization**.
    - Identify respective castes/communities/sub-castes in the central OBC list and **classify them into respective sub-categories**.

- A fourth, was added later: To study the various entries in the Central List of OBCs and **recommend correction** of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription.

- **Note: Article 340 of the Indian Constitution** provides that the President may by order appoint a commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes.

- **Findings So far:**
  - In 2018, the Commission **analysed the data of 1.3 lakh central jobs given under OBC quot**a over the preceding five years and **OBC admissions to central higher education institutions**, including universities, IITs, NITs, IIMs and AIIMS, over the preceding three years. The **findings are:**
    - **97% of all jobs and educational seats** have gone to **just 25% of all sub-castes** classified as OBCs;
    - **983 OBC communities** — 37% of the total — have **zero representation in jobs** and educational institutions;
    - **994 OBC sub-castes have a total representation of only 2.68% i**n recruitment and admissions
  - **What is the current level of OBC recruitment in Central Jobs:**
    - As per the 2018-19 annual report of the Department of Personnel and Training, OBC representation is **13.01% in group-A central government services**, 14.78% in group-B, 22.65% in group-C (excluding safai karmacharis) and 14.46% in group-C (safai karmacharis).
    - RTI information tells us that **there was not a single professor or associate professor appointed under OBC quota in Central Universities**.
      - The data showed that 95.2% of the professors, 92.9% of associate professors and 66.27% of assistant professors were from the general category (which may also include SCs, STs and OBCs who had not availed the quota). At assistant professor level, representation of OBCs was just 14.38%

- **Need of Sub-categorization**
  - **Equitable distribution of benefits:** A perception that only a few affluent communities among the over 2,600 included in the Central List of OBCs have secured a major part of 27% reservation.
  - **Focus Policy implementation**: Various government policies can be tailored specifically to meet the requirements of the most vulnerable groups.
  - **NCBC** had recommended subcategorization in 2015

- **Other Impacts of Subcategorization**

» It will be a significant addition to the Mandal Commission-based OBC system.
» **Political Implication**: It is being seen as an attempt by government to reach out to the most backward classes.

- **Hurdles that subcategorization may face:**
  » It may be **opposed by dominant OBC groups** and regional parties dominated by dominant OBC groups.
  » **Subcategorization with OBC Enumeration** would be a challenge as caste based population data is not publicly available and central government has shown reluctance towards the idea of caste census.
  » Subcategorization would make proper allotment of seats to each reserved group in the new roster system a very difficult task.

- **Way forward:** Subcategorization of OBCs would be successful if the following conditions are met:
  » **Enumerate the OBC population** for objective sub-categorization.
    ▫ Make the recommendations of Justice G Rohini committee public and let it be debated by various stakeholders.
    ▫ Ensure transparency in criteria for subcategorization avoiding ambiguity in classification process.
  » **Sensitize OBC communities** (including the dominant OBC communities) to make them aware of the need of sub-categorization.
  » **Periodic review of subcategorization** to keep the list updated as per the changing socio-economic conditions of various groups.
  » **Ensure effective implementation of OBC reservation** at all levels and take steps against the institutions not doing so.
  » **Improve the roster system** to make sure SC/ST/OBC get the number of seats they are entitled to.
  » **Establish legal and regulatory framework** which ensures effective implementation of subcategorization and makes available fast track grievance redressal

2. GS-3

1) AGRICULTURE: PULSE PRODUCTION IN INDIA

- **Example Questions:**
  - » Discuss the significance of pulse production in India's agriculture system. Analyze the trend in the production of pulses in India and highlight the factors influencing these trends [15 marks, 250 words]
  - » Discuss the key strategies that can increase domestic production of pulses. [10 marks, 150 words]
  - » Examine the role of government policies and initiatives in the pattern of pulse production in India [10 marks, 250 words]

- **Intro**
  - » Pulses are the important source of proteins, vitamins and minerals and are popularly known as "**Poor man's meat**".

- **Advantages Positives about Pulses**
  - » **Nutritional Security:** In a country like India, where many people are poor and vegetarian, pulses are an important and affordable source of protein.
  - » **Suitable for Marginal Environment**: Drought resistant and deep rooting species of pulses can supply ground water to companion crops when planted in inter cropping pattern.
    - Locally adapted pulse varities can enhance production system in dry environments.
  - » **Increase fertility of Land:** The leguminous plants of pulse also help in nitrogen fixation and thus ensuring higher fertility of soil.
  - » **Low food wastage footprint**: Pulses can be stored for longer period without losing their nutritional value and minimizing loss.

- **Various pulses and production in India**.
  - » India is the **largest producer** (25% of global production), **consumer** (27% of world consumption) and **importer (14%)** of pulses in the world.
    - They account for 20% of India's total area under cultivation and provide 7-10% of the total food grains in the country.

  - » **The overall pulse production in India** has gone up from **8.4 million tonnes** in 1950-51 to **27 million tonnes** in 2022-23.
    - In fact, in the last decade, India's production has increased by **50%** (from 18 million tonnes to 27 million tonnes)
    - But, pulse production has not increased in step with the population growth, per capita availability of pulses have **declined from 22.1 kg per person in 1951 to 16.4 kg per person in 2022**.
    - Though there is surplus production of Chana, the imperfect substitution among pulses and limited international availability put pressure on the prices of some pulses.

  - » **Main Crops:**

- **Bengal Gram** (Desi Chick Pea/ Desi Channa), **Pigeon Peas** (Arhar/ Toor/ Red Gram), **Green Beans** (Moong Beans), **Chick Peas** (Kabuli Chana), **Black Matpe** (Urad / Mah / Black Gram), **Red Kidney Beans** (Rajma), **Black eyed Peas** (Lobiya), **Lentils** (Masoor), **White Peas** (Matar) are major pulses grown and consumed in India.

» **Rabi Crops (60% Production Share)**: Gram, Peas, lentil (masur), and black gram
» **Kharif Crops (40% Production Share)**: Arhar(tur), Moong and Urad etc.
» **Gram** (with 50% share) is the most dominant pulse produced and consumed in India. it is followed by **Tur/Arhar (15-20%**) and **Urad & Moong (8-10%).**
  - **Note:** Experts say that Tur's consumption in meals as dal is much more than that of Chana. Chana is used more on account of its use in packaged food.
» **Gram** is the crop of subtropical areas. It is a rainfed crop.
» **Major Pulse Producing States**:
  - Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, UP, and Karnataka.

- **Primary reasons for domestic shortage of pulses and reduction in per capita availability of Pulses in India** are:
  A. The increase in area under cultivation, production and productivity of pulses has been extremely slow.
    » The production of pulses grew only by 45% from 1951 to 2008, while wheat production increased by 320% and rice by 230 percent. Therefore, for pulses India has been import dependent since 1981.
  B. **Low Yield, increased irrigation facilities and Blue Bulls trouble**
    » The yield of wheat is high (around 3,000 - 4,000 kg per ha) as against 750 Kg/ha of pulses.
      - In countries like France (4219 kg/ha), Canada (2000 kg/ha), USA (1882 kg/ha), China (1596 kg/ha) the per unit yield is much higher than that of India.
      - Lower yield is due to poor crop management, prevailing environmental conditions and better irrigation facilities.
    » Hence with improve irrigation facilities farmers in north India (specially Uttar Pradesh) have slowly moved away from pulses.
    » Cattles and blue bulls also preferred pulse crops leading to higher damages for pulse farmers.
  C. **Open ended procurement of wheat and rice under MSP -> Lack of assured price for pulse**
  D. **Very less R&D on pulses globally** (due to very less consumption in advanced western countries)

- **Steps which have been taken to increase pulse production.**
  A. **Measures to incentivize Pulse Production** under **National Food Security Mission (NFSM)**, **Minimum Support Price Programs and by Increase production.**
    - For e.g., PM AASHA's prize support scheme specifically focused on increasing the procurement of pulses on MSP.
  B. MoA&FW have also formulated a **Special Kharif Strategy** which was implemented during Kharif 2021:
    - Here, HYVs of seeds available with Central Seed Agencies or in the States were distributed free of cost to increase area under pule production through intercropping and sole crop.

C. **Crop Diversification Program** (a sub scheme of RKVY) is being implemented in original green revolution states viz. Punjab, Haryana, and in Western Uttar Pradesh to diversify paddy areas towards less water requiring crops like oil seeds, pulses, coarse cereals, agro forestry etc.

- **Way Forward**:
  - » **Augmenting domestic production**
    - **Policy reforms** like higher MSP for pulses and inclusion of pulses under the PDS system.
    - **Improved Agri-Inputs for Pulses:**
      - **Increased R&D** to focus on developing new HVYs which are adapted to drought, climate change etc.
      - **Promoting** cultivation of pulses in well irrigated areas and ensuring better irrigation facilities in existing pulse growing areas.
      - **Ensure timely availability of chemical fertilizers** which has remained a problem for this sector.
        - Similarly, inadequate availability of Gypsum or pyrites as a cheap source of sulphur remains a serious impediment in many states.
      - **Prioritizing the crop insurance scheme in pulse growing regions and its proper implementation**
    - **Promoting Scientific Cultivation**: Currently, improper sowing time, low seed rate, defective sowing methods, insufficient irrigation etc. are the major agronomic constraints.
  - » **Focus on solution for blue bulls' trouble.**
    - Biodiversity protection and conservation in forest areas could ensure enough availability of food for blue bulls in the forest areas and reduce their infiltration in cultivated areas.
  - » **Improving technology of Dal Mills -> Reduce wastage.**
    - Most of the dal mills have outdated technologies, resulting in excessive loss of pulses in the form of broken or powdered grains.
  - » **Distribution channels** also have to be made more efficient.
  - » **Dealing with fluctuation of prices** - Increased buffer stocks and diversifying imports.

2) DISASTER MANAGEMENT: DAM SAFETY

- **Why in news?**
  - » In Oct 2023, Sikkim's highest Dam (**Teesta-III Dam at Chungthang)** was washed away after an GLOF which raised doubts about hydropower projects being developed in the country (Oct 2023)
    - Various reports have since revealed that there were no **EWS, no risk assessment or preventive measures** in place as required under the 2021 Dam Safety Act.

- **Example Questions**
  - » Discuss the key provisions of the Dam Safety Act 2021. How far does it go in ensuring structural and operational safety of dams [12.5 marks, 200 words]
  - » What are the key concerns related to Dam Safety in India? How far will the Dam Safety Act, 2021 be able to resolve these concerns? [10 marks, 150 words]

- **Introduction**

» Dams are playing a very important role in the development of India. They not only supply water for irrigation, but also contribute in flood control and Energy generation (around 17% of India's total electricity).
» In terms of **number of Dams**, India stands third in the world with **more than 6,000 large dams in operation** and another **400+ large dams under construction**. Further, India has thousands of medium and small dams.
▪ However, a **poorly maintained and ill-operated dam** can become a source of threat not only for human life and infrastructure, but also for the environment. Therefore, there has been a long felt need of a **uniform law and administrative structure** in the country for the purpose of dam safety.

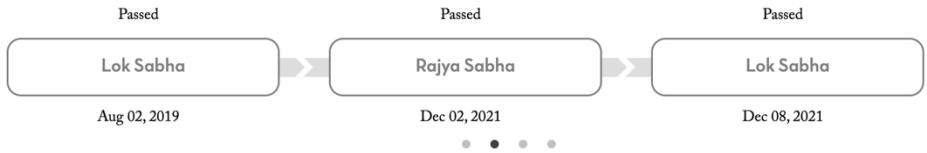
- **Key concerns associated with Dam Safety in India**
» **Very Old Dams** - around 4% (227) of large dams are more than 100 years old and 80% are more than 25 years old.
» Many of these dams are located **in earthquake prone zones**.
» India has faced **36 major dam failure in the past**, the worst one of Machchhu Dam (Gujarat) in 1979 in which about 2000 people had died.
» There are **varying degree of inadequacies** in meeting the current standards of dam health and safety.
▪ **Poor Implementation** of the existing safety provisions
▪ A **report by CAG** has found that
▪ The structural strength of **348 large dams are suspect a**nd they have not been inspected for over a decade.
▪ Similarly, the **world bank report on Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) indicates** that the implementation of the program has been **moderately unsatisfactorily**.

- **Institutional Framework/Programs/Schemes dealing with dam safety in India**
» **The Central Water Commission**, Ministry of Jal Shakti through the National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS), NDSO, SDSCO etc has been making constant endeavours in the direction of Dam Safety.
» **Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP)** is being implemented by Ministry of Jal Shakti with assistance from World Bank.
▫ The main objectives of DRIP are:
a. TO improve the safety performance of **selected existing dams (223 dams across 7 states)** in a sustainable manner
b. To strengthen the dam safety institutional set up in participating states as well as at central level.
▫ The seven DRIP states are - Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Karnataka, Kerala and TN.

» **The Dam Health & Rehabilitation Monitoring Application (DHARMA)**
▪ It is a webtool/app which is focused on digitizing dam related data effectively. It will help in easy identification of vulnerable dams and ensure need based rehabilitation.

» **Ministry of Power** and **DRDO have signed an MoU for** vulnerable **Hydro Projects/ Power Stations** in Hilly Areas
  - Under this they would work jointly together towards developing suitable mitigation measures against avalanches, landslides, glaciers, glacial lakes, and other geo-hazards
  - For vulnerable projects in hilly areas, expertise of DRDO will be used for developing comprehensive EWS.

- **Dam Safety Act, 2021**



» The act is aimed at helping states and UTs to adopt **uniform safety procedure** and thus ensure safety of the dams. It also gives statutory backing to various dam safety institutions and provides for strict punishment in case of the violation of the law.

» It provides for surveillance, inspection, and maintenance of **all specified dams** across the country.
  - These dams are with height more than 15 meters, or height between 10 meters to 15 meters but with certain design and structural principle.
  - The act establishes a **robust Institutional Framework for Dam Safety**:
    - It sets up **two national bodies**
      i. The **National Committee on DAM SAFETY** which would evolve policies and recommend regulations regarding dam safety.
      ii. The **National Dam Safety Authority** which would implement policies of the National Committee, provide technical assistance to State Dam Safety Organizations (SDSO) and resolve matters (dispute resolution) between SDSOs of states or between SDSOs and Dam Owners.

» The law also sets up **two state bodies**
  i. **State Committee on Dame Safety** which will review work of SDSO, order Dam Safety Investigation, recommend dam safety measures and review the progress of such measures.
  ii. **State Dam Safety Organization (SDSO)** will be responsible for surveillance, inspection, monitoring, operation, maintenance and investigation of dams.

» **Jurisdiction over dams**
  - All specified dams will fall under jurisdiction of the SDSO of the state in which dam is situated.
  - For dams owned by CPSU or which extends in two or more states or when a dam owned by one state is situated in other state, NDSA will have the jurisdiction and will play the role of SDSO.

» **What are states required to do?**

        - Provisions require states to classify dams based on hazard risk, conduct regular inspections, create emergency action plan, institute emergency flood warning systems, undertake safety reviews and period risk assessment studies.

    - **Duties and Functions of DAM owners (** sufficient funds, trained manpower, dam safety units to conduct regular inspections, mandatory presence of engineers during floods and emergency, install emergency flood warning system; carry out risk assessment at regular intervals)

    - **Comprehensive DAM Safety Evaluation** (CSE)
        - The act provides for comprehensive safety evaluation **by independent panel of experts at regular intervals**.
    - **Offences and Penalties** for violation of provisions

- **Analysis of the act : Key challenges/Limitations**
    - **Jurisdiction of Parliament on the issue** (**Entry 17 of the State List read with Entry 56 of the Union List**, gives powers to state to make laws on water supply, irrigation and canals, drainage and embankments, storage etc for intra state rivers) **.**
    - The **functions of** the NCDS, NDSA, SCDS are listed in the schedule of the act which can be modified by government through notification. Experts have raised concerns over this kind of overwhelming powers with central government.
    - **States Raising Concerns** regarding NDSA having jurisdiction over dams owned by one state but situated in others. Some states feel that this takes away rights of states over their dams.
        - Note: TN own dams in the state of Kerala (in Mullaperiyar, Parambikulam, Tunakadavu, and Peruvaripallam)
    - **States lack technical capability** to really implement the act in terms of number of trained personnel's, engineers etc.
        - The Sikkim GLOF reveals poor compliance at all levels of dam safety, from the dam's design to the spillway capacity.
    - **Environment Impact ignored**
        - The act does not contain any norms which relates to environmental impact in the upstream and downstream of the rivers.
    - **Lack of focus on operational safety** (like rate of filling or rate of water release) could lead to continuance of cases of Dam induced floods (e.g. Kerala floods, 2018)

- **Other problems related to Dam**
    - **Lack of coordination between states** leads to faulty management of dams.
        - For e.g., the recent floods in Odisha was caused by faulty management of Hirakud Dam. One of the reasons for it was lack of information from Chhattisgarh to Odisha regarding the flow of water.

- **Way forward**
    - **Set up the institutional framework envisaged under the law**
        - **Dam Safety Policy** should be finalized quickly to act as a guiding principle towards protection of Dams.
    - **Promote More transparency:**

        - Dam Safety is a public purpose and thus everything about dame safety, functions of institutions, their reports, decision minutes and agendas, everything should be promptly available to public.
    - » **Human Resource development:**
        - We will need huge human resource for ensuring that trained people man dams, engineers are available for inspection and monitoring, emergency action plan etc.
    - » **Land use plans** should have dam safety issues integrated in it.
    - » **Operational Safety and Environment Impact** needs to be better integrated in the act and any future policies.
    - » **Increased coordination between states**:
        - E.g. of the **United States web-based integrated risk management tool** called **Dam Sector Analysis tool**. The tool was developed using variables from dam failure models and decision support systems, which enables the software to project downstream risk in the case of a dam failure.
- **Conclusion:**
    - » India's first prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, had referred to dams as the 'temples of modern India'. These temples would remain a boon, only if all the stakeholders work towards eliminating risks associated with Dam Safety.