

Legal Reasoning Questions for CLAT | QB Set 18

In a historic ruling, a 7-Judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India has redefined how Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) quotas may function, marking a significant shift since the reservations were first introduced in the Indian Constitution in 1950. The Supreme Court has allowed sub-categorization of caste, which refers to dividing the broader caste groups into smaller, more specific subgroups based on social, economic, or historical disparities. This division aims to ensure that the most disadvantaged within these groups benefit from affirmative action policies, thereby promoting social justice.

The ruling focuses on addressing varying levels of backwardness within SC and ST communities, ensuring that resources and opportunities are distributed more equitably. By recognizing and addressing the unique needs of the most marginalized groups within these communities, states can enhance social justice efforts and upliftment. The court's decision also mandates judicial review of state actions to prevent political misuse, ensuring that sub-categorization is based on genuine need rather than political motivations.

The new approach aims to make the reservation system more effective in bridging socio-economic gaps. Notably, the ruling, led by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, overturned a 2004 decision in *EV Chinniah vs State of Andhra Pradesh*, which held that SC/ST categories should not be subdivided. The current decision, backed by a 6:1 majority, empowers states to create sub-classifications, ultimately allowing for more focused protections for the most backward communities. The judgment includes six separate opinions, with five in favor of sub-classification and one dissenting opinion by Justice Bela Trivedi. The decision enhances the fairness of the reservation system, providing new tools for addressing deeply entrenched inequalities.

Questions

Question 1:

In 2025, the State of Uttar Pradesh introduces a law that sub-categorizes Scheduled Castes (SCs) into three distinct subgroups, based on socio-economic backwardness. The government argues that this sub-categorization will allow more focused benefits for the most disadvantaged within the SC community. A group of petitioners challenges this move, citing the 2004 Supreme Court decision in *EV Chinniah vs State of Andhra Pradesh*,

which held that the sub-classification of SCs was unconstitutional. Based on the recent 2024 Supreme Court ruling, how is the Court likely to decide?

- (a) The law is constitutional, as the 2024 ruling allows states to sub-categorize SCs for more equitable distribution of benefits.
- (b) The law is unconstitutional, as the 2004 EV Chinniah decision prohibits sub-categorization of SCs.
- (c) The law is unconstitutional, as reservations should apply equally to all SCs, without division into subgroups.
- (d) The law is constitutional only if it benefits economically weaker sections, regardless of caste.

Question 2:

Ravi, a member of a less socially and economically advanced SC subgroup, challenges a government decision that gives a greater share of reservations to a more advanced SC subgroup in his state. He argues that the current distribution favors certain SC subgroups who are better off and that he has been unfairly denied opportunities. Under the 2024 Supreme Court ruling, can Ravi's claim of unfairness be upheld?

- (a) Yes, because the government must provide equal reservation benefits to all SCs without discrimination between subgroups.
- (b) No, because the 2024 ruling allows for sub-categorization and redistribution based on varying levels of backwardness within SC groups.
- (c) Yes, because Ravi belongs to a subgroup and is entitled to an equal share of reservations, regardless of his social or economic background.
- (d) No, because affirmative action policies cannot be challenged once they have been implemented by the state.

Question 3:

A state government, after introducing sub-categorization of STs, allocates 40% of reservation benefits to the most disadvantaged subgroup, 35% to a moderately backward subgroup, and 25% to a relatively advanced subgroup. However, a member of the advanced subgroup challenges the new distribution in court, arguing that the state has failed to justify why certain subgroups should receive a larger share of the reservations. According to the 2024 Supreme Court ruling, what must the state demonstrate to defend the sub-categorization?

- (a) The state must prove that the sub-categorization is politically motivated to enhance social justice.

- (b) The state must show that the sub-categorization is based on legitimate social, economic, or historical disparities among the subgroups.
- (c) The state must prove that all ST subgroups will eventually benefit equally from the reservation system.
- (d) The state is not required to justify its decision, as sub-categorization is automatically constitutional.

Question 4:

Following the 2024 ruling on sub-categorization, the State of Maharashtra implements a new policy where only certain subgroups within the SC community are eligible for reservation in government jobs. These subgroups are identified based on backwardness indices developed by an independent commission. Rajesh, a member of an excluded SC subgroup, argues that this sub-categorization discriminates against him. How should the courts assess Rajesh's claim under the 2024 ruling?

- (a) The courts should rule in Rajesh's favor, as exclusion of any SC subgroup from reservations is unconstitutional.
- (b) The courts should refer the matter to the Parliament, as only a constitutional amendment can change the structure of reservations
- (c) The courts should allow Rajesh's claim, as sub-categorization violates the principle of equal access to reservation benefits for all SCs.
- (d) The courts should reject Rajesh's claim, as sub-categorization based on backwardness is allowed if done based on objective criteria.

Question 5:

In a state where sub-categorization of SCs has been implemented, a political party challenges the government, alleging that the classification was created to benefit specific communities aligned with the ruling party's vote bank. The party argues that this undermines the fairness of the system. What must the court evaluate in such a case to determine whether the sub-categorization is constitutionally valid?

- (a) Whether the government had sufficient political support to pass the sub-categorization law.
- (b) Whether the sub-categorization increases the overall reservation quota for SCs in the state.
- (c) Whether all SC communities had a say in the development of the sub-categorization scheme.
- (d) Whether the sub-categorization was based on legitimate backwardness criteria and not for political gain.

Answers & Explanations

Answer to Question 1:

Correct Answer: (a) The law is constitutional, as the 2024 ruling allows states to sub-categorize SCs for more equitable distribution of benefits.

Explanation: The 2024 Supreme Court ruling overturned the 2004 EV Chinnaiiah decision, allowing states to sub-categorize SCs and STs to ensure the most disadvantaged subgroups benefit from affirmative action policies. This sub-categorization is now constitutionally permissible.

Answer to Question 2:

Correct Answer: (b) No, because the 2024 ruling allows for sub-categorization and redistribution based on varying levels of backwardness within SC groups.

Explanation: The 2024 ruling explicitly permits sub-categorization to address varying levels of backwardness within SC communities. Therefore, Ravi's claim that he has been unfairly denied opportunities may not hold if the sub-categorization is aimed at benefiting the most disadvantaged groups.

Answer to Question 3:

Correct Answer: (b) The state must show that the sub-categorization is based on legitimate social, economic, or historical disparities among the subgroups.

Explanation: The 2024 ruling requires states to base sub-categorization on legitimate criteria like socio-economic or historical disparities. The state must provide evidence that the reallocation of benefits is justified by the differing levels of backwardness among the subgroups.

Answer to Question 4:

Correct Answer: (d) The courts should reject Rajesh's claim, as sub-categorization based on backwardness is allowed if done based on objective criteria.

Explanation: The 2024 ruling allows for sub-categorization as long as it is based on objective criteria like backwardness indices. Rajesh's exclusion may not be unconstitutional if it is based on a legitimate determination of his subgroup's relative advancement.

Answer to Question 5:

Correct Answer: (d) Whether the sub-categorization was based on legitimate backwardness criteria and not for political gain.

Explanation: The 2024 Supreme Court ruling mandates that sub-categorization must be based on genuine social and economic need, not political motivations. The court must

evaluate whether the sub-categorization serves a legitimate purpose or was created for political advantage.

