
MANDAL COMMISSION CONTROVERSY

Edited By:
Asghar Ali Engineer

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INTRODUCTION

The Mandal Commission controversy is raging in the country today. There are two most controversial issues today before the nation : one is the Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi issue and the other one is implementation of Mandal Commission Report which was submitted to the Government of India in 1980. Its implementation was kept pending by the Congress-I Government for nine years. The Commission was appointed by the Janata Government in 1979 and by the time the report was completed, the Janata Government fell and the Congress Government came to power again. Hence the report was submitted to the Congress Government headed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi then.

However, the Congress Government was unwilling to implement it as it enjoyed electoral support of twice-born castes alongwith the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. It did not have much of support among what is today known as OBCs (i.e. the Other Backward Castes and Classes). Hence it was not under pressure to implement the report. Though there were repeated demands from OBCs and their supporters to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. The Congress kept on promising to consider implementation of the report but never meant it seriously. Hence it remained an empty promise.

The Janata Dal announced implementation of the report in August, 1990. What was the reason ? Why the Janata Dal or the National Front Government showed such earnestness-and also firmness-in implementing the report? There are various rea-

sons. Also, the opponents of the Report ascribe various motives to the Government for its implementation. We would like to throw some light on this aspect. It is being said by the opponents that it was sheer political opportunism on the part of Sri V.P. Singh. From the timing of its announcement they conclude that V.P. Singh did it to consolidate his position vis-a-vis Shri Devi Lal. He was, they point out, in desperate need of support from the M.Ps. belonging to Backward Castes in his factional fight against Devi Lal.

Also, it is pointed out, V.P. Singh was looking for some controversy to divert attention from Ramjanambhoomi issue and take heat off it. He also calculated, it is said by these opponents, that announcement of implementation of the Report would divide Hindus on caste lines and thus weaken the Hindutva concept of the BJP's polity. The BJP had cultivated a section of OBCs as its vote bank in the name of Ramjanambhoomi during the last General elections in November 1989. This announcement would weaken BJP's electoral base and would make it less aggressive. And finally V.P. Singh would be able to garner OBC votes who anyway constitute more than 50 per cent of Indian electorate and thus emerge as a strong force, in his own right, in Indian power-structure. He would not then have to depend on the support of BJP. Thus V.P. Singh, it was alleged, achieved his personal and party goals at the cost of division of nation along caste lines. The Mandal Commission, it is alleged, would keep Indian society divided along caste lines for ever and would thus seriously impair its unity and integrity.

How far are these arguments tenable? Well, let us note that every politician has some calculations. Politicians are no saints. If they had been one, they would not be in that business. At least they would not, like Mahatma Gandhi, aspire to be part of power-structure. They would guide and advise but would not rule, would not wield power. Mr. V.P. Singh is not Mahatma Gandhi. He may have made certain calculations before announcing implementation of the Mandal Commission Report. However, it hardly detracts from his sincerity in implementing what his party manifesto had promised. Timings

are chosen by the politicians to achieve some other goals as well. The Congress regime never rejected the Report and never maintained that it would divide Indian society along caste lines, if implemented and yed it never implemented it. The Janata Dal thought its implementation would achieve a measure of social justice and acted accordingly, choosing of course, its own timings.

The Congress party in fact its equivocating on the issue. There is no unanimity of opinion about reservations for OBC in the Congress. In no other party for that matter. Every party aspires for OBC votes to some or the other extent. No party, not even the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, can oppose the Report openly and unequivocally. Bal Thackeray of the Sena has opposed the Report in his personal capacity. Many members of his party are not happy about his virulent pronouncements against the Mandal Commission. Chagan Bhujbal, who is important leader of Shiv Sena and currently Mayor of Bombay belongs to OBC himself said about the implementation of the Report, "I most certainly welcome that step, but it has come too late in the day. And that too in a very small measure. In Maharashtra and elsewhere, these castes form about 51 per cent of the population and reservation for is only 27 per cent, thanks to the Supreme Court judgement." Further, refuting merit argument he said, "Certain sections of people, especially in north India, are opposed to this move and have said that merit will be at a discount. If this argument is valid they why have reservations at all? Do away with them altogether, even in the case of Scheduled Castes and tribes. My contention is that the upper castes take care of themselves, the lower castes are provided for by the reservations. it is only middle-level castes (which were not considered untouchables in the past purely for functional reasons, but were otherwise treated no better) were left to fend for themselves. It is only proper that they be taken care of by the government."

Thus it will be seen that the Shiv Sena is divided on the issue of Mandal Commission and it, as a party, did not take stand against it in the public. According to a newspaper report (see Indian Express of 30-8-90), even the RSS is mum

on the issue. The news item says "Rashtriya Swyam Sevak Sangh (RSS)'s all India general secretary H.V. Sheshadri today refused to make a categorical statement on the Mandal Commission Report stating that you cannot have 'a strait jacket answer for a complex problem' even as he called for more 'broad-based reservations instead of the recommended 'caste-based' one." Thus it would be seen that RSS also hesitates to take categorical stand opposing the Report.

The Congress leadership faced near revolt for opposing implementation of the Report. Thus according to *The Independent* of 15-9-90, "There is virtual revolt in the Congress-I over the party's official line on the Mandal Commission report. At a late-night dinner meeting at the residence of leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha P. Shiv Shankar yesterday, Congressmen belonging to the scheduled and backward castes decried the party's ambivalent position on the issue of caste-based reservations and decided to fight their case with determination."

The Congress-I too, it will thus be seen, is not in comfortable position on this issue. After all, it too, cannot ignore completely the votes of backward castes. And, on principle, it does support reservations for the Scheduled Castes and tribes on whom it depends for bulk voting. The Scheduled Castes and tribes may not be very happy with OBCs as in many cases they are their oppressors being landed class but on question of reservation of jobs the SCs and STs have to stand with OBCs lest their own reservations may stand in danger of being attacked. The upper castes, it is well-known, are not quite happy with reservations for SCs and STs but have somehow accepted it as 'necessary evil'. But once the upper castes succeed in successfully sabotaging implementation of Mandal Commission report they can make SC and ST reservations their next target. Thus this battle will be fought jointly by the OBCs and SCs and STs. The Congress-I, which has large support base of SCs and STs cannot be in an unviable position in opposing the Mandal Commission even if the motive is to embarrass the National Front Government of this issue.

Let us now take some arguments which are being advanced by the opponents of the Report. The principal argument is

that if the Mandal Commission Report is implemented it would perpetuate caste-divisions in India and thus it would not be possible to achieve unity and integrity in the country. Thus M.N. Srinivas, doyen among sociologists, says, "Caste is a terribly divisive institution. Given that literacy is 36 per cent and that 70 per cent of the people live in rural areas, caste still has a lot of clout. During the last 43 years, it has been used successfully in mobilising people during elections. Reservations have further strengthened the institution. It is high time we started thinking about where such policies are leading us. " See *The Times of India* "The Mandal Formula" 17-9-90).

We can quote many such experts who maintain that reservations will perpetuate caste divisions in the society and hence it should not be taken as a criterion. But more important and fundamental question is who has perpetrated such divisions in the society? Has Mandal Commission created caste divisions by proposing reservations on that basis or Mandal Commission had to be appointed in view of sharp caste divisions in the society? It would be putting the cart before the horse to argue that Mandal Commission would perpetuate caste divisions in the society. Had there been no caste based discriminations, Mandal Commission would not have been needed at all, in the first place. The fact is that caste-divisions are being perpetrated by the upper castes, in the first place. Had these upper castes been so concerned with doing away with the caste divisions in the society, they would have taken steps by now to ensure better education and better jobs for these so called OBCs so as to do away with the feeling of discrimination from their minds. Let us remember that it is discriminated against who feels most about the discrimination and wants to wipe it out and if it cannot be wiped out by other means, reservation on caste or communal basis is demanded.

It can be argued that it was for the government to take suitable steps all these years to do away with such caste-based discrimination. True. But who controlled government all these years. OBCs have acquired some political clout very recently, in last couple of decades. And it is precisely after they acquired some political clout that they began to demand doing

away with these caste-based discriminations. The top bureaucracy and all the plump posts in higher echelons till today are being controlled by upper castes. Why did they not show enough concern and suggested suitable steps to do away caste-based discriminations? It would have been at their cost so they kept mum all these years and began to protest only when the inevitable happened. They hardly remembered all these years that few upper castes were controlling more than 80 per cent of all important jobs and thus perpetrating worst kind of caste discrimination. They remembered caste-divisions of society suddenly and with all vehemence only when their monopoly was threatened.

Caste divisions would remain in our society as long as the upper castes do not reconcile itself with good grace to the existence of all 'lower castes' with equal rights and dignity. It is only when these castes have 'arrived' socially and economically and realised their rights that one can do away with caste-based division of our society. The democratic processes are deepening with passing of every day and the consciousness of the suppressed and the oppressed is getting sharpened in this process. They can no longer remain content with their artificially induced low status. Now they are conscious enough to demand their share both in political power and government jobs. In south they got both as there is overwhelming population of those who constitute OBC. It is well known that in Tamil Nadu reservation all told exceeds 60 per cent and yet there were no protests. Why those protesting now did not protest against these reservations which far exceeded 50% limit imposed by the Supreme Court. Dose it not mean that the fight is not really principled one but for ones own interests? The upper castes in the north are protesting today because their own interests are threatened.

However, India has chosen a democratic path of development and democratic form of polity. Both require that due share in resources and in power be ensured to all sections of our society. Even the lowliest of the low cannot remain happy with few crumbs thrown at them for very long. Today in our society there are serious imbalances in distribution of power and material resources. We have kept backward castes deprived.

of fruits of development for too long. Only a few upper castes among the backwards have been able to take advantage of agricultural revolution and have become prosperous. But even these castes have no share in industry, commerce and tertiary services. The backwards among the OBCs have no share even in agricultural prosperity let alone in commerce and industry. However, in an open democratic society, their aspirations cannot be kept suppressed for long. They are being organised for struggle for their rights by left political parties and groups and other political parties, of the centre as well as of the right, are going to them for votes and often promising them heaven. Thus we cannot keep their mouths shut for long. Mr. V.P. Singh also appealed to them for votes and promised that the Mandal Commission Report will be implemented. The only difference between V.P. Singh and other politicians is that he fulfilled his promise and implemented the report, though, it must be said, choosing his own time to derive maximum advantage out of it and drawing maximum political mileage out of it. No other politician would have behaved differently, anyway.

Mr. V.P. Singh while playing his politics has done something which will bring a ray of hope and sense of justice to the millions in our society which were caste at the periphery of our society. I do not think playing such politics is that bad. What Mr. Advani is doing by playing his politics in the holy name of Lord Ram is really bad. He has set out for Rath Yatra which has left a trail of blood behind it. We had never witnessed such communal frenzy throughout the country *simultaneously* as we are witnessing today. We had never heard of so many riots throughout the country at a time before. It appears as if whole country is on fire. Who is responsible for it. Is it not Ramjanmbhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy. And who is playing Ramjanambhoomi politics anyway? Is it not strange that in a pluralist country like India where there are so many religions, languages and cultures, national honour is being equated with Hinduism. Can in a pluralist and secular country like India, national honour be equated with any one religion, even if that religion is of majority community?

Will such an equation not seriously undermine unity and integrity of the country? Will it not weaken the faith of minorities in secularism and push them to the precipice of fundamentalism? Will thus competitive fundamentalism do any good to the society in India? Can we build a modern society if all our energies are engaged in avenging medieval insults and humiliations even if these humiliations and insults were not imaginary? Rath Yatra politics of Mr. Lal Krishna Advani is far more divisive than Mandal Commission politics of Mr. V.P. Singh. It also true that implementation of Mandal Commission report has brought about most unfortunate instances of self immolation. So has Mr. Advani's Yatra brought about death of more than 200 innocent people in communal frenzy. Human life is sacred and should be above everything else. As it is our duty to promote communal harmony it is our duty to appeal to the young boys and girls not to take their lives and carry on their struggle, if they oppose Mandal Commission Report, peacefully. However the media, instead of appealing to these youth, has been gleefully reporting these instances of self-immolations.

If it is argued that the Mandal Commission implementation has brought frustration in the lives of these young people and they are ending their lives in sheer despair just imagine the frustration of young people in OBCs and SCs and STs must have gone through for centuries. They had no prospects of any kind in the society. Not only they did not have any hope for government jobs, they had nothing to hope for in the spheres of commerce and industry either. Even if they were best of artisans they were condemned to work as labourers. They produced best of handicrafts which forms part of our national heritage but they lived as untouchables and on starvation levels. That was our sense of 'fairplay'. Now that few posts have been reserved for these unfortunates we are boiling with rage and our youth is immolating itself out of despair.

Argument of Merit

It is being argued that these OBCs would not be efficient nor will they be meritorious enough to run the administration.

Our country's future will be in danger. It has to develop itself energetically and has to explore new fields of technology. What will happen to it if we recruit our administrators, scientists and doctors from the ranks of OBCs who have no tradition of knowledge and have had no brush with modern administrative techniques. They will make mess of everything. They are, after all, of very lowly origin. Some advocates are also arguing what will happen to justice, if judges are drawn from the ranks of these OBCs. However, these are very coloured and partisan arguments.

Those who enjoy all the privileges of ruling, administrating, researching and running affairs of the country, they think they are the most efficient ones to do so. The blacks were similarly derided by the white society in America. Some of the white scientists even tried to discover that the blacks are condemned to be inefficient, ignorant, crime-prone as their genes have been designed as such by the nature. In other words they have been biologically condemned to be what they are. How hollow such discoveries and arguments were, all know very well. Similar arguments by the upper caste theoreticians must be taken with a pinch of salt.

First, let us be clear what efficiency, intelligence, capability, we are talking about. Does that efficiency, intelligence and capability benefitting the whole society or ones own class or caste? No one can deny the fact that in independent India the benefits of these much talked about qualities have never reached the lowliest in the society. If at all something trickled down, it was more out of patronage than by way of right. The judges who are thought to be so efficient have done 'justice' all these years on the terms of upper caste, upper class 'gentlemen'. If these 'lowly brutes' rebelled against these 'gentlemen' they were sentenced to exemplary punishments. Similarly administrative efficiency has invariably worked in favour of these gentlemen. The district level administration has always most efficiently come to the rescue of traders, industrialists and kulaks. There are very few, if any, instances of this efficiency benefitting the downtrodden, the landless labourers, the workers, the tribals, etc.

Very few doctors are known to utilise their expertise to save the lives of the wretched of the society. They are condemned to die any way. And of what use are they to society? Why not then expend energies to keep up rich traders, industrialists, bureaucrats, technologists and others in good health. They are after all so useful to the society. And they can make themselves rich also in the process. Thus it is doubly advantageous. Our great medical specialists may not have even seen rural areas. After all these areas are so dirty that their own health would be in danger.

The top administrators at state and central level are always busy planning for the benefits of upper ten per cent strata of the society. Their skills, their efficiency, cannot be put to any better use after all. It cannot be wasted on illiterate lowly folks. They hardly deserve it. If they are forced to think at times of these lowly creatures, it because of some crazy politicians who depend on their votes and organise them for that purpose to put pressure on the system which is hardly sufficient for these upper caste gentlemen. Our technocrats also invent technology which can benefit in producing consumer goods rather than wage goods. After all consumer goods bring so much profit. Wage goods must be sold cheap. They can hardly be tempting for profit hunters.

Thus we see what merit, efficiency and capability really means in our society. Merit by itself means nothing. It cannot be our goal. Merit should be treated as an instrument, not merely as a goal. That person is most meritorious who has greatest concern for the most poor, the weakest in the society. Merit, if divorced of social concern, can be most dangerous for the society. If one cannot do without merit, one cannot do without commitment and concern for the social justice either. Both must be balanced. I do not say that commitment without merit is superior to merit without commitment; I want to say that both should be to each other. One must complement the other. In certain situations, like in the case of OBCs or SCs and STs, we may have to give some edge to commitment and concern. Reservation, usually described as reverse discrimination, give importance to social concern and commitment. It will correct the balance somewhat.

We should also be clear in our mind that merit is not monopoly of upper castes and classes. Merit is acquisitive, not hereditary. Upper castes have relatively better merit today and they are better equipped with knowledge as they had better chances in life to acquire it. Given these chances, the lower caste masses can also acquire this merit. When faced with challenges, those belonging to lower strata in the society, have been found to be quite inventive. Thus if they are properly trained, they would not only acquire proficiency, they are more likely to work with greater concern and commitment for their unfortunate sisters and brothers. This will be an added advantage in social sense. If they become lawyers and judges, they will do greater justice to unfortunates in the society like them. If they become doctors, they are likely to pay more attention to the health of the poor and the weak in the society and they would know their health problem better. Similarly if they become scientists and technologists, they will invent technology more useful for uplift of people of their origin. If they become bureaucrats and administrators, they will plan and administer with greater sense of commitment to the poor masses of people.

Thus it will be seen that in a country like India commitment and concern for the poor is equally necessary. Pure merit without concern will have no social utility. If pure merit had been sufficient, our scientists, doctors, lawyers, judges, administrators and bureaucrats would have joined hands for the uplift of the poorest in the society and in fact reservations would not have been necessary at all. But we know the system worked only to the advantage of the rich and privileged in the society. Now there is no alternative to reverse discrimination. It is being argued that reservation will benefit only the prosperous among the OBCs. Few forward castes among them will hog all the benefits. Well, this is by and large true. It is not, it should be understood, fault of the reservation system; it is basically the fault of the social system we have. It has been so among the upper castes too. The rich and prosperous among the upper castes have been monopolising all the plum jobs for decades. No one criticises them for that. To an extent it is inevitable.

However, given the dynamism of democratic polity, it cannot become permanent feature. The lowest and the poorest among the OBCs and SCs and STs will begin to realise the importance of education and better government jobs and will therefore begin to make efforts in that direction. Reservation will at least induce them to make efforts. Without reservations there is no way for them even to aspire for these jobs. Also, it is important to note that in the Indian society caste prejudices play an important role even today. A rich OBC fellow may find it more difficult to find a good job than a poor upper caste fellow. A rich Kurmi or a Yadava, for example, might find it tougher to secure a government job than say, a poor Brahmin. Selection committees usually consist of upper caste persons. The low caste persons would not be represented on selection committees unless they themselves secure good jobs through reservations. That is why reservation only on economic basis do not make much sense in this country. If such reservations are accepted by the Government most of the jobs will go to poor from the upper castes and thus the very purpose will be defeated.

As for the argument where the poor from upper castes will go, let the upper castes agree to certain percentage of reservation from the unreserved open category, if they are really concerned about the poor from their castes. Why are they not asking for that. After all open category is still left with 50 per cent of jobs for not more than 20 per cent of people. Few jobs after all could be reserved from amongst these for the poor of the upper caste without much pain. In reserved category, after implementation of Mandal Commission, 52 percent will after all be sharing only 50 percent of jobs among themselves. Let upper caste elite sacrifice few jobs for the poor of their own castes.

It also has to be remembered that casteless society in India can emerge only when all castes are proportionately represented in all the fields. Thus it is only through reservation, paradoxical though it may seem, that caste system in our society can ultimately be beaten. If reservations are not made in jobs, the upper caste monopoly will perpetuate itself and lower castes will continue to feel strong resentment against it. This is

bound to express itself through our democratic political institution. But if there are reservations, justice to the OBCs, SCs and STs will be done and caste feelings will be muted to some extent. So it is not reservations, but non-reservations which will perpetuate caste divisiveness in our society.

Lastly I would like to say a few words about certain technical objections. B.K. Roy Burman and other experts have pointed out certain flaws in the methodology followed by Mandal. There may be some technical flaws. These flaws may be corrected. Few castes may be added or deleted. That is not very major point. It is the spirit of justice which is important and which must be upheld. Methodology can be refined. One should not make it so central that the report may be rejected lock, stock and barrel. Let us not throw the baby alongwith bath water. Also, it is being said that 1931 caste census has been used and hence it is outdated. There has been much caste mobility since then.

Firstly, there has been no caste census ever since and hence there was no other option for Mandal Commission but to accept 1931 data. Secondly, it is not wholly true that there has been great deal of upward caste mobility since 1931. There may have been some individual mobility undoubtedly, but it is wrong to say that there has been entire castes which acquired higher caste status due to such upward mobility. The caste structure has more or less has remained stagnant for centuries, let alone for few decades. It does not require much sociological insights to say that. Few castes have become economically prosperous since 1931 due to agricultural revolution. However, they have not moved up in terms of social status and hierarchy. It is this latter aspect which is very important from reservation point of view. Reservation are needed more for social than economic reasons. If this is not understood one does not understand real spirit of reservation at all.

Bombay, 15.10.90

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

A Fair Deal To All

RAM VILAS PASWAN

Scheduled Castes comprise about 16 percent of the Indian population and Scheduled Tribes another eight percent. These are the people who, have been forced to live a life of social subjugation, economic deprivation and an inhuman existence for ages. Independence in 1947 promised a better future to them. Yet, after 40 years, the fact remains that the goal of economic independence and of true freedom from wants and exploitation is still elusive to a large majority of our scheduled caste and scheduled tribes brethren, particularly, to those living in remote rural areas.

Article 46 of our Constitution enjoins upon the Centre and State Government to promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. A number of programmes were launched in the successive five year plan to achieve these objectives. But for lack of an adequate political will and prevalence of a variety of age-old social prejudices against these people, only a marginal number of persons could be benefitted.

A new Thrust

The National Front Government has made a determined bid to not only ensure effective reach of various programmes to these target groups, but also to arouse greater awareness and self confidence, among these deprived classes to come forward and join the mainstream.

It was with this object that the Government decided to confer 'Bharat Ratna' the nation's highest honour to Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar. It was really sad that the man who played a crucial role in giving independent India its Constitution, himself remained neglected for almost forty years. As Prime Minister V.P. Singh said at the award giving ceremony, "that by conferring Bharat Ratna, we are not honouring Dr. Ambedkar, but, in fact, it is rather a honour for the people of India themselves. A portrait of Dr. Ambedkar has also been installed in the Central Hall of Parliament. Also year-long celebrations were declared from 14th April 1990 to mark the birth centenary of this great messiah of the deprived and down-trodden. It was also decided to observe the centenary year as the 'Year of Social Justice' and to rededicate the nation for ending economic and social deprivation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections through various legislative, administrative and social awareness measures. A National Committee for the Centenary Celebrations has been duly constituted under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister with a wide section of intellectuals, social workers, Chief Ministers of States, MPs and other leaders as members.

A number of legislative measures have been undertaken to protect the weaker classes under the legislative umbrella. The reservation of seats for scheduled castes in the Lok Sabha and in the State Legislative Assemblies has been extended by another 10 years. A long standing demand of the Neo-Buddhists, was fulfilled when the Parliament approved a constitutional amendment to grant them the status of Scheduled Castes. The Welfare Ministry is now examining various proposals, received from the States to include some other communities who deserve this status but for some reasons,

have not been included in the Schedule. It is proposed to bring a suitable Bill in the Parliament once this exercise is over.

Since a majority of the Scheduled Castes work in unorganised sectors, they suffer from various kinds of exploitation in terms of wages and as bonded labourers. Many of our social customs also contribute to atrocities against these people. To deal with the situation, the Parliament had enacted a legislation viz. 'Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989'. One of the very first steps of the National Front Government, after assuming the charge, was the notification of this Act which came into force from 30th January, 1990.

States have been asked to set up Special Courts in each district to deal with the cases of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These courts have been already set up or specified in most of the States.

National Commission

The national Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been strengthened by amending the Constitution in the last session of the Parliament. Now the Commission enjoys statutory status. This constitutional amendment also merges the office of the Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with the National Commission. Thus, the National Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes now will be a single coherent body with statutory powers and more teeth to safeguard the economic and other interests of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Chairman of the Commission has been given the rank of a Cabinet Minister so that he can effectively discharge his functions.

A number of posts in various categories have been reserved in Government offices for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Yet, there remains a great amount of backlog and a large number of posts remain vacant on the plea of non-availability of suitable candidates. The Government has decided to launch special recruitment drives to complete the backlog. A series of meetings have been held with the officials of the

Ministry of Labour, Staff, Selection Commission and other agencies to co-ordinate the efforts. Special programmes are being chalked out to provide vigorous coaching and vocational training in computers etc, to successfully compete in various examinations. Special training programmes are launched to enable them to take advantage of various self employment opportunities. The Government's plan is to complete the backlog within the Ambedkar Centenary Year i.e. by 14th April, 1991. The Government plans to bring a bill in Parliament to ensure that the reserved vacancies are filled regularly and such backlogs do not reoccur. The bill, do among other things, will provide for penal provisions against the erring officials.

Under various welfare measures, the landless Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were provided land. But rarely the actual possession of land was made possible. To make the effective transfer of land the Government passed a Constitutional Amendment Bill. According to this all land reforms legislations have been included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. Thus, by taking land reforms out of the purview of the courts, not only its implementation been ensured but it would also reduce the arrears of litigation that has clogged the judicial system for the past many years.

Rehabilitating Scavengers

A dehumanising and obnoxious practice of scavenging of dry latrines and carrying the human excreta on heads continue in many part of the nation. The Government is launching an ambitious programme to end the practice completely within the next five years in a phased manner. It is estimated that there are nearly 4900 towns in the country where such practices exist. During the current year, a programme for 'Liberation of Scavenger' is proposed in 1000 towns. It comprises conversion of dry latrines into wet ones, rehabilitating the scavengers in new dignified occupations by giving them proper training and other facilities.

The biggest problem with the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes, 95 percent of whom live in forests, is a basic difference in the perceptions of the law by them. They consider the

forests as their own property and many conflicts occur due to these differences of perceptions. Particularly so, when the forest land is utilised for construction of different projects. The solution calls for a proper dialogue and a comprehensive plan. While developmental projects must go on, arrangements have to be made for rehabilitation of the tribals and that too in a dignified manner.

These and many other programmes are on the Governments agenda. A new thrust will be given to them during the 'Year of Social Justice'. But what really needed is a basic change in the people's attitude. The distinction between the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other higher castes has done enough harm to our society.

To achieve the goal of a classless society-a society in which each citizen irrespective of his caste, creed or community enjoys a dignified living - one has to recognise the 'dignity of labour'. Today, little respect is given to those who toil on the land, in the factories, in the streets and even in our own homes, while all honours are bestowed on white collar jobs. This situation has to undergo a tremendous transformation which is indeed a difficult task but not impossible to materialise if we are determined to act with complete dedication.

(P.I.B. Release)

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'Twice-Born' Riot against Democracy

GAIL OMVEDT

Any Caste based reservation system, in this case the Mandal Commission, has to be judged in terms of what it can do and not in terms of what it is not supposed to do—and in this case its goal is the limited but important one of ending caste monopoly in public sector jobs.

Writing on the Mandal Commission and the 'caste war' going on around it almost seems an exercise in futility. Opinion on the subject is so nearly totally predictable from caste status that the readiness of the masses of the people to believe any written arguments must be declining rapidly. Can one convince dalits and Shudras (a term I consider more appropriate than 'OBC' for reasons that will become clear) by writing in journal like *EPW* or in any English-language paper today? They themselves (particularly dalits) have already thought the issue through on a collective basis - historically, from 1917 onwards, the same caste-groups have been involved in the reservation debate and the same arguments have been used more or less as today—and the less politically-conscious

Shudra sections of the northern states are rapidly learning also. There is a war going on in the streets (and implicitly in the polling booths) and a war of words accompanying it in the press, showing the fundamental caste-divide in India between the 'twice-born' (perhaps the most accurate term for the upper three varnas, more popularly known as the Brahman Bania-Thakur group) and the rest (which may be termed, to use Jotirao Phule's language, as Shudras and anti-Shudras, or Bahujan and dalits), as well as the various sub contradictions and ambiguities among these groups. The twice-born outnumber the dalits and Shudras in the forums which produce the 'war of words', but the dalits and Shudras outnumber the twice-born in the streets and in the population as a whole, and this is what will be decisive in the end. About all that seems left to do, in the English language press, is to discuss with the twice-born what is going on.

Who is taking what side in the ideological battle? First, those who oppose the Mandal Commission are invariably the twice-born, the high castes and some connected 'high-caste' minority groups (those of the Brahman/Kshatriya, Vaishya varnas plus Parsis, high-caste Christians, etc.). Their caste-strategy, as we may call it, requires such opposition.

Second, a few of the twice-born, mostly those in the left or associated with mass struggles, are supporting the Mandal Commission or remaining neutral, one is even heading the implementation of the report. These, we may say, are going in opposition to their caste-strategy to identify with the oppressed and exploited castes, and their existence has to be noted because it represents one important thrust of democratic and secular elements in the system.

Third, there is a group of castes who are confused, because they could potentially be included in the castes listed in the Mandal Commission (and in some cases historically they have had reservations) but they are not included at present, or they are ambiguously included. Therefore, they can have two caste strategies, to oppose Mandal, or to argue for inclusion. To oppose it aligns them with the twice-born, to argue for inclusion aligns them with the dalit-Shudra castes. (I am referring here primarily to such Shudra peasant castes as the Jats,

Kunbi Marathas, Vokkaligas etc, but their is also the small but influential Kayastha category who were traditionally treated as Shudras in most places but whose orientation to service/mental work has aligned their interests with the twice born).

Fourth, dalits and adivasis (specifically the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha) are supporting the Mandal Commission and are even ready to support widening its terms of reference, in spite of the fact that the Mandal Commission does not immediately benefit them, and in spite of the fact that the twice-born are using the name of dalits and the 'truly backward' to oppose the Mandal Commission on the grounds that it is extending reservations to "economically advanced" rural "dominant castes" who are the ones responsible for committing atrocities on dalits. Dalits in fact are taking the battle for the Mandal Commission as their battle and in some cases at least seem to have-been more militant and organised on the issue than the fragmented and hierarchicised Shudras.¹ The dalits are also taking this stand on the basis of a caste-strategy. That is, they are quite aware that twice-born opposition is not simply to 'OBC' reservations but to any kind of reservations, and that if they succeed in beating back the Shudras on this they will next more to push back the dalits. In addition, dalits want an alliance with the Shudras that will give them a solid and effective majority against the twice-born, whom they consider their main enemy. If one pays attention to statements of dalit leaders, this is clear. In the words of Arun Kamble at a Vishamta Nirmulan Parishad in Kolhapur some years back: "We are 85 per cent of the population, we can be a ruling group. We don't want dalitisthan; *India should become dalitsthan.*" Here 'we' clearly include dalits, adivasis, the balutedars or 'OBC' castes and the Maratha-Kunbi caste complex; in fact Kamble went on to call for a 'kunbi-isation' of the Marathas. Kanshi Ram also uses the figure of 85 per cent to identify the bahujans' whom his party claims to represent, and his slogan draws the line clearly: brahman, bania, thakur cor; baki sab DS-4.² And he has been making some interesting alliances in these terms recently, first with Mulayam Yadav against Tikait (dalits+Yadavas against Jats, who are the most ambivalent element in the 'bahujan' category) then with

Devi Lal (dalits and Jats versus the brahman-bourgeois combine; Kanshi Ram's language was more that of a caste alliance which depicted VP Singh, the Thakur, as the main enemy ; whereas Devi Lal's was more 'class'-based in appealing to the rural sector against urban capitalists. But there was enough of an overlap to produce the alliance).

Political party positions are almost equally predictable in terms of caste strategy. BJP is in the most helpless position because its rhetoric of Hindu unity is getting disproved in practice by the struggle and because while it wants to appeal to the masses it cannot go against its Brahman leadership very much. The Congress is in almost equally bad shape, as the main party of the bourgeois-brahman combine which has tried to build an electoral base on an appeal to dalits and adivasis (or the 'rural poor') against most of the Shudras (the middle peasants and now finds this strategy getting refuted in practice; the somersaults of the Congress indicate its dilemma and its apparent involvement in provoking conflict in many areas indicate its cynicism regarding the nation whose integrity it claims to be the best upholder of. The Janta Dal is also a bit divided but is most solidly with the Mandal Commission due to its strong Shudra element. The Communist left has brahmanic leadership and its traditional Marxist ideology has not helped it to understand or appreciate the issue very well, but its main base among Shudras and dalits generally puts it on their side and on the side of the Mandal Commission. In all these parties there is a predictable internal division falling along caste lines, and in all cases arguments about 'economic criteria' are being used to confuse the issue and advance twice-born interests (this is not to say that the issue of economic exploitation is irrelevant ; it is very much relevant; only that the particular appeal to 'economic factors' made in the case of the Mandal Commission is invariably a smokescreen).

One almost feels it is not necessary to write. Dalits and Shudras have been mostly sitting it out watching upper-caste students getting killed in battling the police because they know that they are a majority and will have their day, and that in the twice-born cannot defend themselves against the united Shudras and dalits. Their most astute leaders are telling them so. Their

is some bloodshed going on, and any bloodshed is tragic, but for a country the size of India, with such intense interests involved, with 2,000 years of domination (and violence) of the upper-castes to have a reckoning with, there is a relatively low level of violence. There is nothing like the 'civil war' that some of the hysterical English-language press reports are talking about. And, this particular episode of the caste war is *not* "dividing the nation"—it has been twice born, particularly brahmanic, centralist and Hinduising strategies that have had the most effect at dividing the nation, and the dalits and Shudras have a better strategy for uniting India than the twice-born and a better understanding of what exactly India is.

Finally, it may be that the biggest immediate gain for the overall progressive movement from this battle over the Mandal Commission will be that it becomes much more difficult after this to organise an agitation on Ramjanmabhoomi. The twice-born of northern India will be exhausted after their current outburst and can hardly fight alone in Ayodhya and it will be very hard for them after this to rally Shudras behind them when it is so clear that Hindus are not 'one'. With Bal Thackeray opposing the Mandal Commission and Chhagan Bhujbal and others supporting it, the caste division in Shiv Sena has also become clear. The fundamental contradiction of the *Hindutva* ideology—its brahmanism versus its attempts to get a mass base—is being exposed.

What Is Mandal Commission About ?

With this mind, it is still worth going into some of the issues involved. What is the Mandal Commission all about? Its cutting edge, after all, is caste-based reservations. Though we hear a lot of talk about economic criteria and the "socially and economically backward", the historical process involved has been one in which non-Brahman and dalit castes have asked for reservations to overcome twice-born monopoly of jobs; the upper castes have resisted this and have used economic criteria as a way of avoiding dealing with caste and have succeeded in imposing economic criteria from above on various state-level programmes and on the Mandal Commission itself from the

1960s onward.³ There was never a separate movement of the poor (or organisations of workers and peasants) for 'economic' reservations; the issue has been that of caste.

Here we should be clear about what caste-based reservations can and cannot do. Caste-based reservations cannot remove poverty, cannot end economic exploitation; they cannot "uplift the poor". They can only make some of the poor non-poor. (It has to be stressed that this is also true for reservations based on economic criteria, which is why the class organisations of the poor have never demanded them).

What they can do is end the castemonopoly of organised sector jobs especially of the public sector. This is a caste monopoly of the twice-born, most predominantly Brahmans, and as many have pointed out, including S.S. Gill, secretary of the Mandal Commission, it is a caste monopoly that has arisen out of a heritage of thousands of years of caste reservation in India in which Shudras and ati-Shudras were forbidden access to power, wealth and status⁴. Destroying or lessening this castemonopoly helps to create a middle class section among castes that are largely poor—a fact that is sometimes used as a charge against caste reservations, but in fact it is inevitable and progressive to the extent that it breaks up the correlation of 'caste and class'. This itself will not end casteism but it may be a necessary condition for doing so. A programme to end economic exploitation and reduce/abolish poverty must be a different one—it is necessary to take up such a programme along with caste-based reservations, but it does not negate their value, and caste reservations themselves will tend to aid, indirectly, the process of fighting economic exploitation.

In other words, any caste-based reservations system, in this case that of the Mandal Commission, has to be judged in terms of what it can do and not in terms of what is not supposed to do — and in this case its goal is the limited but important one of ending caste monopoly in public sector jobs.

What after all are we talking about? Public sector employment, and the education that is a channel or entry card to such employment. Now the whole of the organised sector represents not more than 10 per cent of the Indian workforce: of this the

public sector is about 2/3, so we are talking of at the most 7 per cent of the employment available in the entire country, not more. Of course, this 7 per cent is a highly privileged sector. According to a 1981 statistical estimates the average income of public sector employees stood at Rs. 10,613, while cultivators had an average income of Rs. 3,000, agricultural labourers of Rs. 1,703 and unorganised sector wage labourers of Rs. 4,871⁵. It should be clear why no one has been asking for reservation in agricultural employment or in unorganised sector jobs. It should also be clear why the "educated unemployment" in this country is not a true unemployment, the educated youth wandering the village and city streets today could get work as common labourers or add their labour to the family farm, but prefer not to, and their families will themselves work supporting the idleness of the youth, for reasons that seem even rational -- not much economic gain will come from unorganised sector work, but once the golden apple of organised sector employment has fallen into his hands, his future and to some extent that of his family is assured.

Seven per cent -- and any talk of 'job creation' by the government or private sector at this level is an illusion employment at such high levels of use of resources cannot be extended in any significant way. Most of the talk of 'right to work' also seems to ignore this fact; whatever work can be provided -- without fundamental changes in the entire path of development -- on a 'universal' basis can only be unorganised sector labouring jobs, i.e. down there on the level of the agricultural labourer and the EGS worker. And nobody in their right mind really wants such jobs, if they have any alternative.

The real means to reduce poverty and move towards equality and affluence is to have a strategy for reducing the gap between the organised and unorganised, sector and to bring up the unorganised sector as a whole. (I am using rather unMarxist language here, and we could as easily talk of 'exploitation', but it has to be remembered that the same issues regarding price ratios between industry and agriculture, or how quickly and in what direction land reform can be pushed, not to mention caste reservations as such, will have to be faced by any group of revolutionaries 'seizing power'). Debates about how to do this are going on and various means

are being suggested, from right to work to land reform to remunerative prices to a combination of strategies. Without going into the issue here, it can be noted that the debates are related and the controversies of the 'new agricultural policy' and 'new industrial policy' are relevant and connected to the Mandal Commission 'caste war'. It is not accidental, probably, that just as there is a concerted and at times hysterical outcry in the English press language over caste reservations, focusing on the charge that the economically advanced 'dominant castes' we gain from the Mandal programme, so there is an equally concerted ideological charge against the kulak lobby' from very similar sources. It is also not accidental that the same elite (and the English language press) is divided over the new industrial policy which for the most part looks like a quarrel between its private capital and bureaucratic capital factions.

In any case, while programmes for abolishing poverty are taken up as long as gap between the organised and unorganised sector remains it is not unreasonable to demand that the caste monopoly of jobs in the public sector be reduced and that we move towards abolishing it completely. This is a broad democratic demand, a matter of simple justice.

What does a 'Caste monopoly' mean ?

In concrete terms, a caste monopoly can be defined as the difference between the percentage of government jobs held by a caste-category, and its proportion of the population. Prior to independence this was very high, especially for Brahmans. Since independence, accurate information has simply not been available since caste statistics are not recorded—the censuses take data only on SCs and STs; there are few studies down of higher-level employment (as contrasted, say, to case studies of villages) and even these tend to record only SCs STs and 'other Hindus'. This allows the monopoly of the twice born castes to lie hidden among the broad 'other' section and gives no information about the various Shudra groups.

But there are scattered indications. For instance, one dalit source has given the statistics that in 1981 Brahmans

were 48 per cent of the Lok Sabha, 36 per cent of the Rajya Sabha, 50 per cent of governors and lieutenant governors, 54 per cent of secretaries to the former, 53 per cent of union secretaries, 54 per cent of chief secretaries, 70 per cent of private secretaries to ministers, 62 per cent of joint and additional secretaries, 51 per cent of vice chancellors, 56 per cent of Supreme Court judges, 50 per cent of high court judges and additional judges, 41 per cent of ambassadors, 57 per cent of chief executives of Central Public Undertakings and 82 per cent of chief executives of State Public Undertakings". "These figures, if valid, are of course quite high. But that is not the only point. The point is, that if Brahmans represent around, say, 30 per cent of all government employes (that is 30 per cent of the 7 per cent), the proportion of Brahmans in the workforce having such public sector jobs would be about 40 per cent (if we assume Brahmans to be about 5 per cent of the total population) and that is a good deal. If there were no caste monopoly-- or if there were universal reservation (i.e. reservation of all varna categories by proportion of the population) this figure would go down to 7 per cent. In other words, Brahmans stand to lose a great deal at least in the short run, and they are being pushed in this direction by the reservation demands, and that is obviously why they are so upset. The same is true, to a lesser degree of the other twice-born (Thakurs and Banias) and of the small categories (Parsis, Kayasthas, high caste Christians as opposed to Dalit Christians, etc.)

What about dalits and Shudras at the other end of the scale? Obviously, the trend of their movement along the path of breaking the caste monopoly will be to go from nearly nothing or only a very low representation (i.e., one to two per cent of them having government employment) up to 7 per cent. SCs and STs have had reservation for a fairly long period of time; the STs have hardly been able to take advantage of them but the SCs have, and they are gradually moving up. For instance, the figures for 1982 show that the SCs, with 16.67 per cent of the total population, were 15.8 per cent of employees in central government service—23.41 per cent of

Class IV, 13.39 per cent of Class III, 9.02 per cent of Class II and 5.49 per cent of Class I'. It has been estimated by Lelah Dushkin, a US sociologist who has studied the subject closely, that possibly one of 1½ million have 'white collar government service (positions in Class II and III) and this with the administrative level cadre she considers enough of a 'critical mass' to have some effect.⁸ that is, it helps the dalit middle class to constitute itself; it produces a weighty political force; and having access to some white-collar help or caste-fellows in the bureaucracy provides some relief to the rural dalit poor.

Dushkin also argues the reservations and other preferential schemes have had very little impact on the rural poor among dalits, and that where government schemes have had some impact these have been the general programmes (such as state-supported education) aimed at providing services to the poor of all castes.⁹ But if reservations don't directly help the rural poor this flows from the nature of reservations themselves, i.e. the limited and elite nature of public sector jobs—that is, that while dalits may move towards proportionality in terms of representation in government service, they can never go very much beyond 7 per cent in terms of representation of the broader dalit castes. At the beginning of reservations where only a small percentage of dalits have education to qualify for such jobs this does not matter much, but as education spreads, the competition for the reserved seats themselves grows, the issue of their getting monopolised by some castes or sub-castes within the broader dalit section emerges, and the dalit middle class tends to close itself off from the broader population—in other words, it becomes more and more clear that reservations do not solve the basic problems of poverty and economic exploitation.

Further, as this process happens, the 'merit' argument also tends to resolve itself. As education, consciousness and organisation spread and competition for reserved seats also grows, the gap between the marks required for 'open' and 'reserved' seats goes down, and with only 7 per cent able to get the jobs, competition will in any case be there. Of course, there are many other responses to the gloomy and sometimes hysterical pictures drawn of an increasingly incompetent professional/bureaucratic

elite—that there is sufficient cheating and buying of positions in the ‘open’ categories anyway, that even honest marks in exams in an educational system based on passive memorising and regurgitating give inadequate evidence of capabilities for real work. Generally it may be argued that peasants and workers themselves will protect standards’ in educational systems that seem relevant to them.¹⁰

A word about ‘economic criteria’. I have tended to argue against them. We have some evidence that where ‘social-economic backwardness’ replaces a caste criteria the twice-born tend to re-establish their caste monopoly within the reserved quota since it is so easy to get a false certificate.¹¹ But we have to recognise that even if ‘economic criteria’ could be applied in some fair matter, they would not end poverty any more than caste reservations could end poverty as long as the gap between the organised and unorganised sector remains ; they would only ensure a rotation of jobs, somewhat of a creation of a meritocracy’. This might in itself be desirable, but a meritocratic elite is not the same as an equalitarian society.

What is currently going on in debates about ‘economic criteria’ ? We hear the question, what about the boy (why not girl ?) from a poor Brahman family ? Doesn’t he deserve reservation more than the boy from a wealthy dalit or ‘backward’ family ? In my view, the question is a bogus one. If by justice the boy from a poor Brahman family should displace anyone, he should displace the boy from the rich Brahman family, while or boy a girl from a poor dalit family should displace the rich of his/her own caste. If criteria are to be applied at all, they should be applied universally) (i.e., to the so-called ‘open’ sector as well as to the reserved quota).

And in fact, some of the debate on the ‘economic criteria’ is getting expressed in these terms. The upper-caste position has been that either ‘economic criteria should be applied instead of caste criteria in the reserved quota (which would mean, paradigmatically, that a poor Brahman boy would displace a better-off dalit/Shudra applicant) or that they should be added to caste criteria in the reserved quota (which, if they were honestly applied, would mean that

reserved quota candidates would come from poorer families without a tradition of education, while the richer upper-caste families in the 'open' quota would continue to dominate). V.P. Singh gave a reply to this on August 27 where he proposed that there should be an added category of 'economically backward' which would cut into the 'open sector (which would mean, paradigmatically, a poor Brahman boy displacing a richer Brahman boy). The lines of opinion on the interpretation of 'economic criteria' are as predictable as on the whole issue of reservation.

Which castes should get Reservations ?

The movement for reservations has, over the years, pushed for including more and more of the castes in the 'Shudra' category among those claiming reservations and for claiming a greater and greater proportion of seats as reserved ; the upper castes have been desperately trying to hold this back. In fact, the reservation movement is in the *direction* of proposing universal reservations, in which each varna or major caste-cluster would have reservations according to population—and while this is horrifying to many (Brahmans having only 3½ per cent seats ?) it is in many ways both logical and just.

In a system of universal reservations, there could be broad varna categories (1) Brahman, Kshatria, Vaishya (these could be subdivided if those involved wish so) ; (2) Shudra (this category should be subdivided into the two relatively large category of the 'upper' or peasant-caste Shudras, and the rest) ; (3) Dalit ; and (4) Adivasi, with separate categories for the major minorities subdivided if the majority wish so. It would also be logical and just to give 50 per cent of each category to women, with, if one wants, a proviso that these should not be from the same family as men getting jobs.

The first category would have about 15 per cent or less in a system of universal reservations (which is why dalit leaders talk of the 85 per cent). At present, we are moving towards a system in which categories 2 and 3 have 50 per cent (less than their actual proportion in the population) while the first category continues to dominate the remaining 50 per cent, probably mostly at the expense of the minorities. But there is no particular logic to having 50 per cent

cent 'open' except that a Supreme Court decision has said so ; i.e., the same logic of building equality in the face of caste discrimination and caste monopoly that justifies reservations according to population for SCs and STs also justifies them for all Shudras. If there were no caste monopoly, if caste did not exist as a sociological fact, or if 'caste division' were really only divisions between groups of more or less equal status, then the percentage of members of a caste-cluster holding the most privileged government jobs and would be about what universal reservations would give them, i.e., 7 per cent.

In any case once the *principle* of reservation is decided upon, the task of deciding which caste-groups (jatis or local units of jatis) fit in which category becomes a technical one, and this is where the question of 'expertise' and census/survey statistics becomes relevant. The Mandal Commission is currently criticised for being sloppy, for making outrageous mistakes and inconsistencies regarding the classification of many castes. But it is noteworthy that the three 'experts' who have dissociated themselves from the commission — M.N. Srinivas, B.K. Roy-Burman and Yogendra Singh — appear not simply to question the criteria of inclusion but the very principle of reservation on a caste basis itself. This is certainly true of Srinivas, whose writings on the issue reproduce all the tired clichés of any anti-reservation polemic.¹¹ This is not to say that the Mandal Commission did not make mistakes, but it was after all trying to make some compromise with economic criteria and a survey by one commission, however expert the people may be, will always have its limitations in a country the size of India. Without taking up caste again in the census, we will not have very accurate overall, national-level data on the broad categories.

But it is still not, after all, very difficult to decide which caste-groups belong in which broad category. There is no need for an elaborate social science survey at the district level, for instance ; local people know who is who. The final decision about inclusion could be taken by a three-member panel at the district level, consisting of one dalit, on Shudra-caste and one twice-born caste member. This should ensure as much objectivity and fairness as is possible.

Dont Reservations Perpetuate Caste ?

It really is astonishing to read world-known sociologists like M.N. Srinivas and Andre Beteille write as if caste as a social reality did not exist, as if only the political use of caste were perpetuating it, and as if reservations themselves were creating a division. Srinivas writes, "with the reservation system we are fast moving away from the equalitarian society which our Constitution enshrined as an ideal", Beteille writes, "caste has no function today except in politics¹²".

Such 'analyses' are only likely to discredit intellectuals, for they fit into the common experience that Brahmans and others of the elite always tend to deny (especially to outsiders' or before any official bodies) that caste exists as an important social reality in India, when every middle and low-caste person, anyone living in this country for that matter, knows that it permeates life at all levels. When in Lok Sabha discussions Rajiv Gandhi in a long tirade against V. P. Singh's policy accused him of maintaining casteism, Sharad Yadav rose to ask if any in the house (aside from Gandhi) had made an intercaste marriage ; no hand was raised¹³.

The basic reply of pro-reservationists to those who charge that reservations perpetuate casteism is simple : they only bring into the realm of consciousness and public action a caste hierarchy that already exists. The first prerequisite, after all, of acting to end an injustice is to admit its existence, one cannot thereby accuse the admission of existence of itself being an injustice.

Nevertheless, it is true that caste reservation - and the process of having to produce certificates - do constantly keep the issue in a person's consciousness. This should be compensated for by an overall process of reducing the importance of the sphere of life in which caste is relevant, and building as many spheres of life as possible in which caste does not matter. We should remember there is still a 90 per cent 'open' sphere of the economy ; this should be opened up further where caste barriers do operate (e.g., where dalits tend not to have the 'tradition' for farming as well as being landless) and at the same time we should move in

the direction of reducing the organised-unorganised sector gap, making agriculture more profitable relative to service, etc. Social life should be opened up—i.e., interdining and intermarriage. A 'new caste' or community of those struggling for social justice has to be genuinely built.

It should be remembered that if there is truly action against economic exploitation and political domination—towards reducing the organised-unorganised sector gap, towards changing the economic system that makes a government job so valuable, toward s reducing the power of the bureaucracy—the ability of reservations in the public sector to perpetuate anything will become much less salient.

Finally, any system of political intervention on caste should provide for the process of that system: socially withering away. With the caste system, this begins to happen when there is so much intermarriage, for whatever reasons, that children can hardly identify their 'caste' membership. This can be easily provided for even within a quota system of universal reservations. Let there be one category for whose are products of inter-categories marriages. This would be the true 'open' quota, and its proportion could even be kept a few percentage points ahead of the actual (estimated) proportion of such 'non-caste' people in the population to provide some incentive. As and when the 'caste divide' truly withers away, this category will, over the years, grow and eventually swamp the rest a testimony to the creation of a truly caste-less India.

Looking ahead

'Democracy is the name of the game in the world today', we frequently hear and in fact, from South Africa to Nicaragua to eastern Europe, reactionaries and revolutionaries alike are being forced to take majorities into account. The democratic upsurge is uneven, at points ambiguous, and it is causing a lot of heart-rending to some of the pre-existing concepts of socialism and how to reach it; but in so many ways people are on the move, and the democratic challenge is also reducing the freedom of manoeuvre of the worst exploiters, US imperialism. Democracy for the exploited and oppressed means not simply formal political democracy but also economic

well-being and the bringing forward of all the forms in which their oppression is articulated—such as gender, nationality, race, and, in India, caste. Movements to break the caste monopoly are a part of the broad democratic upsurge in the world today, in which the dalit and Shudra alliance is finally making a claim for power at the national level in India.

M.N. Srinivas has argued that caste reservations are responsible for a permanent 'brain drain': "It is painful to see teenagers leaving the country in hordes. They seek and obtain admission to the best American universities and in the process, we lose the best brains. This is happening because of the reservation system".¹¹ A side from the arrogant implication that there is no genius or political sagacity left in India, as someone coming the other way I frankly doubt that reservations make much difference: people seem to be going abroad when and as they can for about the same reason those who stay in India seek organised sector jobs. But to the extent that the twice-born go abroad at a disproportionate rate, the process may benefit both countries. Over there, they can learn what racist discrimination means; the best of them will come back and the rest can be part of a process of pushing for a 'majority of colour' in the US. As Daya Pawar has written in an early poem.

You wrote from Los Angeles

"In the stores here, in hotels, about the streets.

Indians and curs are measured with the same yardstick

'Niggers', 'Blacks!'" This the abuse they fling me

And deep in my heart a thousand scorpions sting me".

Reading all this, I felt *so damn good!*

Now You've had a taste of what we've suffered

In this country from generation to generation.

The truth is that the issues of the reservation system in India are reproduced in the US in regard to white domination (and there are disparities among non-white groups similar to those about Shudras and dalits, though without the clear hierarchy); the same arguments that are made about reservations in India can be heard regarding the much milder system of affirmative action in the U.S. The difference is that whites have had a

much more solid majority. But this is vanishing ; it is now predicted that by the year 2000 a frail non-white majority will emerge in the US. And as this majority grows, their demands for democracy will gather force, the question of really recognising the value of cultural disparities will be pushed forward and such issues as reservation/affirmative action will come up as part of the broader sight against exploitation

The movement of breaking down the old monopolies of race, nationality, gender, caste is a powerful democratic movement in the world today, and for all its ebbs and flows, all its unevenness and ambiguities, is unstoppable. We may even say to extend Arun Kamble's call, that the whole world shall become dalitisthan.

NOTES

1. Ambedkar made a point of this in 1949, when he told a meeting of Kunbis at Mahad, "it seems that in Maharashtra at least, it is only Mahars and Brahmans who understand politics"—and appealed to the Kunbis to think about their caste interests and not join the "Brahman-bourgeois-dominated" Congress; see *Janata* March 30, 1940.
2. See *Sunday Observer*, August 12, 1990.
3. See Marc Galantar, 'Who Are the Other Backward Classes,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 28, 1978. Galantar's account makes it clear that the heavy domination of Brahmans in the academic world and the bureaucracy affected this imposition: "By the beginning of the 1960s the tide was running strongly against definition of the Backward Classes by community. Opposition within the government was augmented by criticism from academics [M.N. Srinivas is cited here as a leading authority] and much of the national press, who voiced a common suspicion of the caste criterion. For the first time since 1951 a court intervened to strike down a scheme for Backward Classes in a decision widely acclaimed as blow at casteism... While a 'casteless and classless society' remained the avowed aim of the Congress and a wide section of the intelligentsia, there had been a subtle shift in notions of how this aim was to be pursued... The notion of caste differentials as themselves a significant form of inequality deserving of special government attention gave way to a notion that the salient differences were economic; specific redistributive measures directed at caste differences were not necessary, since overall development would raise the general level... The withdrawal of

the central government from involvement in preferences for the Other Backward Classes was confirmed by the omission of any provision for them in the central sector of the Third Five-Year Plan. The central government's campaign for economic criteria in the states was given added impetus by the...intervention of the Supreme Court...In September 1962 the Supreme Court struck down the Mysore Backward Classes list, whose defects included exclusive reliance on caste standing as a measure of backwardness, adding the onus of constitutional disrepute to the caste criterion. The court's judgment, which warmly recommended economic tests, was widely acclaimed..." (p 1819). It is clear that the public opinion forums alluded to here covered only a very narrow sector of the Indian population. "Widely acclaimed" (by whom?); "notions" (among whom?) Who are the academics? Who sits on the Planning Commission? Who heads and sits on the various caste commissions evidently is a sociologically significant fact. Galantar also notes Nehru's "extraordinary reticence about using the word 'caste'" (p 59).

4. S.S. Gill, 'Mandal: Myth of Merit and Equity', *Times of India*, September 4 1990.
5. Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy, *Basic Statistics on the Indian Economy*, 1987, Volume 1, Table 10.1.
6. *Dalit Voice*, December 1-15, 1989. The Lok Sabha figures are difficult to accept, though the others seem quite likely.
7. CMIE, *Basic Statistics*, 1987, Volume 1, Table 1.8D.
8. Lelah Dushkin, *Equalising Opportunities in India—with Reservations*, Paper presented at Conference on Minority Strategies Comparative Perspectives, New York, November 11, 1985. See also Dushkin, 'Backward Class Benefits and Social Class in India, 1920-1970', *EPW*, April 7, 1979.
9. *Ibid*, pp. 6-8.
10. A story from Maharashtra will indicate this. In 1987 peasants of Khanapur taluka in Sangli district held a demonstration under the leadership of Mukti Sangarsh against their local university, Shivaji University at Kolhapur, demanding that the university do research on the causes of drought and its eradication. "or else we ourselves will go into the library and do research" Following this relations actually improved between the university and its connected colleges and the Mukti Sangarsh Movement; students on the National Service Scheme took part in anti drought activities, a university committee was set up, and a new vice-chancellor, K.G. Pawar, an eminent geologist, associated himself with this support. This year (August 1990) a group of Bihari engineering students at a capitation fee college demanded that they be allowed to pass even with less than 50 per cent marks, and started an 'indefinite fast' that included some very vicious language threatening university authorities and the vice-chancellor ("Who is he? My chaprassi makes more money than he does! We'll tear him to pieces"). Mukti Sangarsh activists and

peasants took the lead in rallying local students against such an 'anti-educational' demand; the Biharis literally ran away.

11. After the Supreme Court decision of 1962, Karnataka adopted a non-caste income/occupation criterion of backwardness; in 1963 Brahmans (3 1/2 per cent of the population) got 36 per cent of the admission to engineering colleges in 'merit' and 15.5 per cent of the seats reserved for 'socially and educationally backward', Dushkin, *Equalising Opportunities...* p 14.
12. Srinivas, 'End of the Egalitarian Dream', *Sunday Observer*, August 12, 1990; see also *Times of India*, September 6, 1990.
13. Srinivas, op. cit; Andre Beteille, 'Caste and Politics', *Times of India*, September 11, 1990.
14. See Vasant Bhosle's report in *Kesari*, September, 11, 1990 page 2 (in Marathi).

A Conflict of Interest

S.S. GILL

With no let-up in the anti-reservation agitation, critics of V.P. Singh's decision to implement the Mandal commission's recommendations have raised the spectre of a caste war.

S.S. Gill, who was secretary of the Mandal commission and drafted the controversial report, argues that those who raise the bogey of caste clashes are giving free rein to empty rhetoric.

The national press has been issuing increasingly strident warnings that the acceptance of the Mandal commission report will shatter the spirit of national cohesion, divide the society on sectarian lines, promote caste conflicts and unleash civil war. The disturbances in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, Rajasthan and other states, and the highly publicised students' agitation in Delhi are cited as only a prelude to the impending apocalypse.

Anybody who believes that 27 per cent reservation of government jobs for other backward classes (OBCs) would fragment Hindu society on caste lines is displaying a degree of innocence which one rarely comes across in this wicked, wicked world. The scheduled castes and tribes constitute 22.5 per cent of our population, and the backward classes

aggregate 52 per cent. Thus, despite adding up to 74.5 per cent, or three-fourths of the country's inhabitants, what is their share of the national resources? How many of them are top bureaucrats, chief executives of public or private undertakings, press barons? If you draw up a list of the ten or a hundred or even a thousand richest families in this country, how many of them would come from this three-fourths of our population? Out of more than 50 secretaries to the Government of India, perhaps not even one belongs to these castes/classes.

The fact of the matter is that ours is and has always been, a deeply divided society. And despite all the social mobility, Sanskritisation and modernisation, this division has been basically along caste lines.

Otherwise how do you explain that the three swarna castes, totalling just 17.6 percent, have managed to collect at all the plums from the national cake and the lower castes, despite being four times more numerous, have to make do with only left-overs and dry crumbs? And this is the situation despite all the reservations, development plans and poverty eradication programmes which an enlightened social welfare state has launched over the past four decades. If this situation did not divide society on a caste basis and lead to caste wars, how can 27 per cent reservation of government jobs for this exploited mass lead to civil wars?

Caste-based reservations have been practised in this country most effectively for the past 3000 years. When Shambuk, a sudra, went into deep meditation, Ram, the upholder of the moral law, chopped off his head for breaking the caste code. When Eklavya, an adivasi, mastered the art of archery despite Dronacharya's rebuff, he had to offer his right-hand thumb as *guru dakshina* for violating the rule of caste-based reservations. And in view of the continued all-round deprivation of the lower castes over the centuries, these apocryphal anecdotes should not sound too far-fetched.

As secretary of the Mandal commission, I had the occasion to accompany the commission in its country wide tours and met hundreds of caste associations. Though in the earlier part of my career I had been doing various field jobs in a very

backward state, yet it came as a shock to me to see how little the caste bonds had loosened over the years. If the caste phenomenon is now hitting the urban intelligentsia with such force, it is not owing to the revival of casteism, but the inexorable unfolding of the democratic processes and, particularly, adult franchise.

“Those in India who complain of casteism in politics”, wrote Rajni Kothari, ‘are really looking for a sort of politics which has no basis in society.’ The Mandal report endorses the observation of Kothari that the interaction of caste and democratic politics has produced two results. First, the caste system made available to the leadership structural and ideological basis for political mobilisation. Second, the leadership was forced to make concessions to local opinion, take its cue from the consensus that existed as regards claims to power, articulate political competition on traditional lines and, in turn, organise castes for economic and political purposes. Politics and society began moving nearer and a new infrastructure started coming into being.’ The backwards are now using the crutch of caste so vehemently not because they are particularly casteist, but owing to the absence of any other ladder for upward mobility. “Politics affords to the lower castes an opportunity,” says Kothari, “to achieve through politics what they cannot through social instrumentalities”.

It is generally argued that if we really want to help the backwards, the state should provide special educational facilities for their children, give them free mid-day meals and books, open hostels, arrange intensive coaching classes to prepare candidates for competitive examinations and so on. But outright reservation on a caste basis, it is asserted, militates against merit and violates the basic norms of fair play.

There is no doubt that OBCs would finally come up only when educationally they reach the same levels as the upper castes. But this is a painfully slow process; how slow, I shall illustrate by a couple of examples. Even one generation after the introduction of job and educational reservations for SCs and STs, only ten candidates from these categories got into IAS in open competition in ten years from 1969-78. As during this period more than 100 candidates were selected to IAS

every year, it works out to less than 1 per cent success rate on 'merit' from a group constituting 22.5 per cent of the country's population. On the other hand, job and educational reservations were introduced in Mysore state as far back as 1921. Yet, even in 1990, 19.5 per cent posts in higher employment and 21.5 per cent in higher education were held by brahmins, who formed hardly 3.5 per cent of the state's population. Further, 41 per cent of secretaries to the Karnataka government were also brahmins (Karnataka third backward classes commission report, 1990).

Education alone, therefore, would not help in improving the morale of the backward classes. Government service in India carries high prestige, and by giving government employment to OBC candidates, you immediately raise their social status. It needs to be emphasised that job quotas are not a poverty alleviation programme, as they do not create additional jobs or more wealth. Backwards number nearly 450 million, and to what extent can you raise their economic level by just employing a few thousands of them each year? Reservations are essentially a confidence building measure.

As to the question of 'merit', it is really hard on promising youngsters to be pushed down in favour of backwards with lower marks in examinations and lower ranks in competition. But 'merit' is a very tricky aggregate. These high caste bright candidates own their meritorious performance as much to their high IQs as to their cultural advantages. Even a mediocre child from an affluent urban home, exposed to a highly stimulating environment, educated in public schools and with excellent role models to copy, would do much better in a competition than the offspring of a weaver living in a remote village, despite being endowed with the IQ of a genius.

So far as the upper castes are concerned, the situation after 27 per cent reservations may not be as bleak as it appears at first sight. After all, with 17.6 per cent share in population, 50.5 per cent of the posts, ie nearly three times their numerical ratio, would still be available in the open pool.

The trouble with the present scheme of things is that the rules of the game have been laid down by the privileged classes and any deviation from them is dubbed as unfair and arbitrary.

Thousands of students without any merit in the conventional sense, succeed in getting admission to technical and professional institutions by paying heavy capitation fees. This is also a form of reservation for the moneyed classes. But no agitations are mounted, bands called and buses burnt in protest against violation of the principle of merit. Tens of thousands of scions of influential families, who were considered duds, drop-outs and delinquents during their younger days, are pushed into cushy slots owing to the influence of their sires. This is a case of reservation by family influence. Here again no protests are raised despite such gross violation of the basic norms of equity and merit.

There is a widespread impression that the policy of reservations would make the backwards lethargic and work-shy, as the absence of open competition would rob them of the incentive to work hard and become self-reliant. This argument is based on the fallacy that under the quota system all backward aspirants for government jobs would get them just for the asking. It is not realised that millions of OBC candidates would be lined up for only a limited number of jobs and, consequently, there would be intense competition among them to make the grade.

An issue being hotly debated presently is whether economic criteria should not replace socio-educational backwardness as the basis for reservations. Though it looks very egalitarian on the face of it, yet it misses the rationale behind articles 15(4)/16(4)/340 of the Constitution under which the reservation policy is framed. The Constitution provides only for social and educational backwardness as the basis of reservations, and very rightly so. The lower castes have suffered the most humiliating ostracisation for centuries owing to their inferior ritual status. It is this basic social handicap which deprived them of the benefits of education. And the combination of these two factors is the real cause of their economic backwardness. Consequently, poverty is only a symptom, and the real cause lies in social and educational deprivation.

In fact, poverty is the most pervasive fact of our national life, and it cuts across all barriers of caste, religion, region and language. But poverty alleviation is sought through numerous

development plans, rural employment and poverty eradication schemes. The Eighth Plan lays special emphasis on employment generation. Thousands of crores spent on these plans and schemes are meant to tackle the problem of poverty in general. But, as noted earlier, reservation of jobs is not a poverty alleviation programme. It has a much more modest objective and it is targeted at a specific group characterised by extreme social and educational backwardness. It should, therefore, not be confused with the much larger objective of removing mass poverty.

A much weightier objection is the listing of some dominant intermediate peasant castes as OBCs, and this point is used to question the very basis for the identification of the backwards by the Mandal commission. It may be of interest to note that the complete design of the survey along with a set of schedules, dummy tables and instructions were prepared by a panel of experts comprising some of the top sociologists of the country. A high level technical committee prepared a list of 11 'indicators of backwardness'. As an unseemly controversy has grown over this issue, I would like to state categorically that the survey design and indicators were accepted by the commission in toto and not even a comma was altered by us. The whole survey operation was organised under the guidance of the director general, Central Statistical Organisation and chief executive, National Sample Survey Organisation, and actually handled by the directors of state bureaus of economics and statistics. The mountain of the data thus collected was processed by the national information centre of electronics commission. This was one of the biggest sociological surveys ever undertaken in this country and it was conducted with the help of eminent specialists in their respective fields.

Yet, despite all the precautions taken, no sociological survey of such large dimensions can be wholly fool-proof. Depending on the vagaries of purposive sampling, some aberrations bound are bound to creep in. The judicious approach here should be to rectify obvious distortions through limited and specifically targeted fresh surveys and not to throw away the baby with the bath water.

Perhaps a much simpler corrective to all such anomalies would be to introduce a means-test within the OBC spectrum.

This would automatically exclude the better of OBC families from the benefits of reservation.

One problem with the current controversy on reservation is that few contenders seem to have actually read the report. Its most glaring example is the government's announcement that it is willing to consider the claims of minorities also. But both the government and the minorities seems to be blissfully ignorant that this point has been already conceded. OBCs, which constitute 53 per cent of the population, consists of two segments; one, 43·7 per cent are low Hindu castes. and, two, 8·4, per cent are backward non-Hindu classes. These 8·4 per cent comprise 'all untouchables converted to non-Hindu religion', plus hereditary occupational communities like 'dhobi' teli, dheemar, nai, gujar, kumhar, lohar, darji badhai etc.'

While wrapping up, I may submit that the opinion leaders of OBCs also carry a heavy responsibility for giving a proper sense of direction to the raging controversy on reservations. It would cause needless offence to triumphantly gloat over the acceptance of the quota system, or to aim at settling the old scores of history. Any confrontationalist posturings would be counter productive. It is indeed sad that bright young students would be denied their claims to better employment as a result of the quota system. Their individual loss is a national loss too. The whole situation, therefore, has to be viewed with a lot of compassion and understanding, and any acts or statements which raise the temperature of the national discourse should be carefully avoided.

The present situation is a typical instance of conflict between the directive principle of our Constitution and fundamental rights, between the right of the individual and that of the society. This ancient land has the wisdom and resilience to contain the gravest of crises, and it would certainly get the better of the Mandal trauma also. And this, notwithstanding all the bloated rhetoric about caste conflicts and civil war.

Caste And Politics

The Great Secular Upsurge

RAJNI KOTHARI

Exactly 20 years ago, I had edited and published a book, *Caste In Indian Politics*, in which I had brought together a number of empirical studies from various regions on the interrelationship between caste and politics and provided an analytical framework in an introduction. I had argued that, contrary to the belief that democratic politics and adult franchise were providing a new lease of life to caste, what was in fact happening was a transformation in the nature of caste under the impact of competitive politics and new values of democracy and secularism.

In an oft-repeated quote from that book over the last twenty years (including in question papers on sociology and political sociology), "casteism in politics is no more and no less than politicisation of caste". The key process was politicisation. It still is, I have no reason to change the position I took then. If anything, new development have further borne it out.

Plural Society

In today's context two opposite tendencies identified in the

original argument bear repeating. One is that castes in the form of endogamous *jatis* are too small and numerous—and subject to polarisation within each under opposite party pulls—to be of much avail by themselves ; there was a clear necessity to aggregate into larger collectivities. In the old days these were caste associations and caste federation each of which entered into negotiations with political parties at local and regional levels. In the new setting these are class-like formations, the Dalits, the “Kshatriyas”, the backward classes, the “other” backward classes.

The opposite tendency to this phenomenon of aggregation is to act as a pluralist bulwark against too universalistic an aggregation such as the entire Hindu religion, or the idea of a majority community consolidating itself as one big force. Caste, considered in this way, cuts across religiously invoked symbolism. Thus the “backwards” include not just castes in the Hindu fold ; they include Muslim, Sikh, Christian entities too. In short, caste formations are at once aggregative and dis-aggregative, emphasising the secular dimension of a plural society. Caste, indeed, is the great seculariser in a society being pulled apart by convoluted religions bent upon tearing apart the social fabric.

Whatever one thinks of the drift and confusion of the new regime, it has brought to fore some truly indigenous forces for the first time in full militancy ; *Veekendrikaran Ki rajniti* (recentralisation of the polity), the advocacy of Hindi and other Indian languages, the Gandhian thrust in planning, the ascendancy of grassroots activists, the Mandal Commission, Mulayam Singh Yadav. In tune with this new thrust of ground forces is the new role of caste (notwithstanding the anti-caste rhetoric of the militants). The moot point is that here is an indigenous institution that is playing a modern democratic role, something that social anthropologists should have noticed long back, but given their class background, they have been unable to. It is the phenomenon of politicisation of tradition that most of these scholars, a political to the core that they are, are unable to comprehend.

They are also unable to comprehend that class configurations take different forms here than in Western industrial

societies. In a predominantly rural and socially diverse society, class finds its basis in the transformation of caste, the basic social unit of not just the Hindus but of Muslims, Christians and Sikhs as well. It is by waging conflict with the exploiting castes and getting organised around larger secular identities like the Dalits and the janjatis that class formations have taken place.

On the contrary, exogenous efforts to impose universalist ideologies have been defeated by the pluralist framework of a caste society. Two such efforts have been modernisation through economic development and modern education modelled on Western urbanised societies ; and *Hindutva* through imposing a Semitised framework encompassing the whole country. The first has clearly failed and the second is bound to fail. It is not surprising that in bringing about the defeat of the first irreligious form of secularism the dispersed identities of caste and ethnic variety within diverse religious millieus have been effective while in defeating the second *religious* drive for consolidation out of the dispersed identities comprising more than fifty per cent of the population have played a role.

Class Conflict

The phenomenon of Backward (and Other Backward) Classes can be understood only in the framework of class as found in India's indigenous, context rather than that of 'casteism' as is being alleged by the academia and the rampaging students. What we have under way then is a class conflict born out of a distinctive cultural context of neither 'India' nor 'Bharat' but something far more composite than both. Hence the nervousness of both the urban professionals and the entrenched peasant castes, a la Tikait.

The emergence of class configurations out of dispersed and fragmented caste identities has taken a large diversity of forms ; there is no one single formation : we are after all dealing with a highly plural and regionally federal structure of social reality. Thus in Tamil Nadu, building upon the early efflorescence of the anti-Brahmin movement led by the great Periyar in which values of truth and science and secularism (including the use

of anti religious symbols) were put to use, there took place a wide spectrum of lower caste assertions, getting consolidated in Dravida and Tamil identities. A significant part of these assertions took the form of special quotas and reservations for jobs and seats in educational institutions.

In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the political ascendency of middle peasant castes (Reddys and Kammas, Lingayats and Vokkaligas) was followed by responses from spaces lower down, again making use of special reservations, going up to more than eighty per cent in Karnataka under Devraj Urs and later. In Kerala caste identities became rallying points for class-like party formations, starting with the Ezhawas, at one time the most depressed of all the communities.

Political Monopoly

In Maharashtra the influence of Dr. Ambedkar and the rise of the Mahars against the political monopoly of the Marathas produced a version of radicalisation that has been based on a class-caste symbiosis. Even the organised militant left came under this influence and we had the birth of a Satyashodhak Communist Party in Dhule and other districts. In Gujarat the anti-reservation riots and their communal (anti-Muslim) twist gave rise to ground level consolidation of Dalits, Adivasis and the minorities.

It is against this background of social mobilisation in other parts of India that the impact of the Backward Classes movement in North India, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, has to be gauged. Ram Manohar Lohia was the patron saint of this movement and made these classes the social base of the Samyukta Socialist party, distancing these communities from the caste-based vote banks of the Congress. Karpoori Thakur followed in his footsteps and during his tenure as chief minister in the late seventies tried to build a broad enough political consensus against the 'forward castes' consisting of Dalits, tribals and the minorities. Once again the effort, which produced a violent backlash from the 'forwards', was meant to generate a class-like formation.

The work of the Mandal Commission was built upon these diverse movements in different regions of the country. Crucial

to understanding its main message (even if it may not be fully realised in practice in the short run) is the class consciousness associated with a trans-caste mobilisation based on a numerical majority of the population. (It is the backlash from the upper and 'forward' castes against the upsurge that is casteist, not the upsurge itself). And yet it is a class configuration that builds upon rather than destroys primary (caste) identities.

To reiterate a point already made, it is a message that also rejects pan-Indian *Hindutva* and makes of caste a bulwark against religious fundamentalism and its fascist overtones. It is caste playing a secular historical role that we are witness to in the growth of social mobility that the Mandal Commission and its various antecedents have given rise to.

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

Mandal Revisited

RAM JETHMALANI

This piece does not represent editor Shourie's views. I am not sure it represents *Indian Express* views. It reflects my views and of many others, who are more in number than the anti-reservationists would like to believe.

Those allergic to the Mandal report or its implementation are entitled to a forceful expression of their views. But their much vaunted merit or superior intelligence is not in evidence when valuable public property is burnt and normal working of the social and economic mechanism is brought to a grinding halt by them by violence and hooliganism.

It is said that the Prime Minister's announcement that the Mandal Commission report was going to be implemented is a vote catching gimmick and a political sleight of hand. Implicit in this calumny is an amazing ignorance of India's historical sickness and our Constitutional prescriptions for it. The bewildering and unjust caste system of India was conjured up neither by Mr Mandal nor by Mr V.P. Singh.

Bonds of Nationhood

The framers of the India Constitution were not looking for vote banks. Those great and wise men had realised that India had to be welded into one nation and the bonds of

nationhood would require to be re-inforced. The invisible glue which binds people into a single composite identity distinct from others is principally provided by an intense longing to live and die together in preference to any others. This longing is in turn based on mutual co-operation in the pursuit of common political and social objectives. This feeling cannot arise or long remain in the hearts of those condemned to appalling poverty if they see a few amongst them wallowing in obscene wealth.

Those who beat the drums of a march into the twenty first century should ponder over the fact that at the close of the twentieth there will be 500 million of us living in squalor. It is absurd to expect a feeling of national solidarity from people whose self-esteem, self-confidence, motivation and ambition are all destroyed by social injustice.

No doubt poverty is endemic for a vast majority of our countrymen. They all need to be rescued from its quagmire. But the poverty relevant to this discourse is not the general poverty resulting from general causes like colonial exploitation, paucity of natural resources or inefficient management of the economy. What is relevant is a special kind of poverty which is the direct result of unspeakable atrocities perpetrated by a small number of privilege individuals on the vast majority of their own countrymen.

The Constitution makers took cognizance of the tragic historical realities and promised to the people, justice—social, economic and political. They promised dignity of the individual as a step towards integrity and unity of the nation. The preamble of the Constitution does not talk of merit or efficiency. It preferred justice as a superior goal and made it a fundamental principle of governance of the country that: “the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitations.” Article 46 of the Constitution).

The Article notices the existence of an abnormal kind of ‘weaker sections’ of society. They are weaker not because of general causes affecting the entire nation but because of

their specifically being victims of social injustice and manifold forms of exploitation through the long course of history. It is the obligation of all Governments to promote their educational and economic interests with special care.

Our great classics provide examples of our historical callousness. Manu enjoyed obedience to caste rules as the very essence of dharma. The Ramayana tells us that Shambuk, a Shudra was beheaded because he committed the sacrilegious act of meditation. The Mahabharata familiarises us with the tribal boy Eklavya who made himself an archery expert but being a tribal was compelled to lose his thumb as Gurudakshina to Dronacharya.

Make Penance

India can never become a nation unless the high castes are prepared to make penance by willingly acquiescing in the state pursuing the policy of compensatory discrimination with persistence and generosity. It may sound odd to some ears but the truth is that in some way we are accountable as well as punishable for the sins of our ancestors. Our young men in particular need to be educated that the merit they are talking of is only inherited ability or ability acquired in unfair circumstances. Under a political and social system in which the voice of the downtrodden has been unconsonably suppressed, a few privileged ones have succeeded in settling the criteria of merit for their own benefit and then they have proceeded to put unfair price tags on their own brand of supposed merit. Actually there is no intrinsic or compelling reason why a sweeper should not get more than a soldier or a soldier get more than a Minister.

The argument of meritocracy is thus a myth. Minimum professional standards are not being diluted. Professional schools operating under a quota system do not profess to certify incompetents. Indeed it is possible that handicapped students having demonstrated their ability to overcome handicaps imposed by their caste or the resulting backwardness will develop their abilities more rapidly than others. Social Darwinism is both immoral and unconstitutional. Indian society will have to firmly reject it.

The Supreme Court in a 1985 decision speaking through, Mr Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy has firmly and irrefutably put the merit argument to rest.

Merit Argument

“...One of the results of the superior, elitist approach is that the question of reservation is invariably viewed as the conflict between meritarian principle and compensatory principle. No, it is not so. The real conflict is between the class of people who have never been in or who have already moved out of the desert of poverty, illiteracy and backwardness and are entrenched in the basis of convenient living and those who are still in the desert and want to reach the oasis. There is not enough fruit in the garden and so those who are in, want to keep out those who are out. The disastrous consequences of the so-called meritarian principle to the vast majority of the under-nourished, poverty-stricken, barely literate and vulnerable people of our country are too obvious to be stated. And, what is merit? There is no merit in a system which brings about such consequences. If not a child of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or Other Backward Classes who has been brought up in an atmosphere of penury, illiteracy and anti-culture who is looked down upon by tradition and society who has not books and magazines to read at home, no radio to listen, no TV to watch, no one to help him with his home work who goes to the nearest board school and college, whose parents are either illiterate or so ignorant and ill-informed that he cannot even hope to seek their advice on any matter of importance, a child who must perforce trudge to the nearest public reading room to read a newspaper to know what is happening in the world, has not this child got merit if he with all his disadvantages is able to secure the qualifying 40 percent or 50 per cent of the marks at a competitive examination where the children of the upper-classes who have all the advantages who go to St. Paul's High School and St. Stephen's College and who have perhaps been specially coached for the examination may secure 70, 80 or even 90 per cent of the marks? Surely a child who has been able to jump so many

hurdles may be expected to do better and better as he progresses in life..." (1985) Suppl. SCR 394—K.C.V. Kumar V. Karnataka.

Reservations do not perpetuate caste. They destroy its ugly manifestations. When a member of the Scheduled Caste becomes a subinspector — may be not a brilliant one — the high caste constable would salute him. That becomes the first significant step towards creating a classless society which Mr Rajiv Gandhi professes to stand for.

The very persons who now shout that Mr V.P. Singh is perpetuating caste have never been ashamed of exploiting caste for very conceivable political and economic purpose. Never, for example, has merit been the operative principle of our political life. Is it possible for any one to seriously suggest that any Government, past or present is composed of the most efficient and meritorious Ministers? Is the bureaucracy composed of men of highest integrity and honesty? Are our superior courts composed of best legal brains of the country? Are our armed forces composed of the best soldiers available? Is it not that sycophancy and ability to manipulate have become qualifications for many appointments and promotions?

Limitless Scope

It behaves all political parties to impress upon the young that real talent of the higher castes has vast, almost limitless scope for growth and achievement. The whole of the private sector is available to them. The liberal professions are wholly open to them. The business, commerce, industry in the rest of world outside India are open to them. Even in the field of public employment vast chunks like defence and atomic research have been left out for them. In the net result, the controversy dwindles into a fight for about forty thousand jobs, the overwhelming majority of which fall in class IV and III.

The choice before our young men of merit is clear. Do they want to tear apart the social fabric acting on a blind selfish impulse or do they wish to cement Indian society and make of it a powerful nation in which the most backward of

us will be able to proclaim one day that they no longer need special care? The Mandal report is not and does not even pretend to be a solution of the general poverty and backwardness that constitute our major national headaches. It is not even the final solution of the ills that beset our historically weaker sections. The real solution is to increase the size of the national cake by expansion of educational facilities and the job market. The real solution is to produce more wealth by sound economic management. Above all, the most effective solution is effective control of numbers and reduction of the numbers that want a slice of the cake. But until that happens the weak and the meek shall not wait.

(Courtesy : *Indian Express*)

Pathology of Uncivil Society

Ritualism Unites Mandal –Mandir Moves

ARVIND N. DAS

Even after so much blood has been spilled, the central point of the anti Mandal agitation is still not obvious to the unbiased observer. Is it about jobs? Or is it about caste? Is it about promoting an undifferentiated Hindudom? Or is it about displacing Mr V.P. Singh from the Prime Ministerial chair?

By contrast the motives of the government are apparent enough. In his interviews to *The Times of India* and UNI, Mr. V.P. Singh has stated that he has taken recourse to this bit of piecemeal social engineering in order to check the eruption of widespread discontent among the other backward classes. However, the conviction persists among the upper castes that the partial implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal commission is inspired by the *realpolitik* of expanding and consolidating the vote of the National Front. The mincing one step forward, two steps back jig performed by Mr V.P. Singh on the Mandal issue indeed leaves little room for doubt on this account.

The question which arises however is whether such a manoeuvre is illegitimate in a democratic polity. After all, deposits into and withdrawals from vote banks have been routine democratic transactions and these are what Mr V.P.

Singh is engaged in. For all its pretension, the Mandal "revolution" such as it is—in truth it is only a pathetically symbolic act—is being carried out "from above" and the groundswell is absent.

Aggressive Hindutva

At the same time, the resistance to even such minor changes as may be brought about by Mandalisation is disproportionate. The active role being played in the anti-Mandal movement by anti-social elements, political operators with unsavoury pasts stretching to November 1984 and beyond and the votaries of aggressive Hindutva, whose *sine quanon* is caste, has made it clear that the upsurge is directed towards the issue of jobs only to a very limited extent.

Without doubt many students are extremely insecure about their career prospects and their intense insecurity is reflected in the obsessive anxiety which is driving them towards dramatic gestures ending even in death. However, is the very gesture and symbolism give away the protestations that the movement is primarily about jobs. The articulation of blatantly castiest slogans about Mr Ram Vilas Paswan and others, the demand of the Confederation of Class I Government Officials to do away with reservations altogether, even those relating to Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SC-STs), the insidious linking of efficiency and merit to upper caste such as through statements that railway accidents have increased on account of employment SC-STs, ect., show that the movement is at least as much about preservation of caste inequities as about cornering jobs in a limited job market. A particularly reprehensible manifestation of casteist and sexist stereotypes was in the slogan of girl students demanding "non-reservationist and well-employed husbands" rather than jobs for themselves.

The reinforcement of such ideas which go against the very bases of civilisation and modernity by ideologues and publicists who claim to stand for those very values, through repeated, articulate and powerful propaganda in the mass media, obviously inflames the tinder in the minds of the youth. Apprehending their own defeat in the battle of numbers that democracy is, those who have enjoyed upper caste plutocracy are

urging the youth to commit *Jauhar* for a cause that is thinly disguised as being noble: the protection of merit. Even the fact that dominant elements in the movement are rampaging lumpens who have nothing to do with promotion of merit and upper class-caste men out to preserve their traditional class, caste and gender superiority does not shame the ideologues into dropping their masks of merit.

Party Politics

Such a manipulative 'meritocracy', a pultocracy of the privileged, is inherently hypocritical. The arguments of the anti-Mandalists who pretend to be promoting meritocracy would be more consistent if they had the honesty to deny democracy altogether. However, in spite of such closet fascists, democracy survives in India in spite of all its complexities and inefficiencies. And India is better off for it.

It is inevitable in the context of the party politics, which is an essential feature of Indian democracy, that the anti-Mandal agitation should have been used for partisan and factional ends. The divergence in the stands of political parties outside and within Parliament has not escaped notice. Every political party realises that electoral success depends on the balance in vote banks. The Congress and the BJP are in this respect no different from the National Front. It is only that at present Mr V.P. Singh has emerged as a more skilful player of political monopoly.

In the long run however, Mr V.P. Singh's position does not depend on his smartness but on his sincerity, commitment, competence and consistency. It is here that the question mark hangs over his head like Damocles' scimitar. Economic profligacy to benefit the burgeoning affluent (most of whom also belong to upper castes) cannot for long go hand in hand with constructive populism. Administrative incompetence cannot be hidden under rhetoric.

And, in the end, the instruments of the state can only be used to reform society, not to revolutionise it. Mr Singh is after all only a half-hearted revolutionary, much like Jawaharlal Nehru. The difference is that while Nehru remained by and

large unchallenged, basking in the after-glow the freedom movement, the number of Mr V.P. Singh's challengers is legion and their motive are many.

However, in today's context, the question of Mr Singh's personal fortunes is not really important. What is much more significant is that the very values that he claims to stand for, namely parliamentary democracy, the supremacy of the judiciary, the sovereignty of the people such as they may be, statutory obligations towards promotion of equity and the consolidation of republican and secular India, are all in grave peril.

Paradoxically, the most potent danger to India comes not from substantive matters but from symbolism. It is the revivalist and bornagain sanctification of primitive and macabre ritualism that poses the gravest threat to India at the end of the twentieth century. The crude combination of casteist recalcitrance and religious ritualism was represented by the dramatic attempt of some upper caste men in Patna to cut off their necks and offer their severed heads to the Goddess Durga.

The logic seeking to endow legitimacy to self-immolation is similar to the revivalist arguments used to justify *Sati*. It is surprising that learned cultural anthropologists, who have commented at length on Mandal, have not thought it fit to point to the destructive potential of macabre rituals which draw strength from the sanctity of religion.

Communal Carnage

Nor has notice been taken of the invention of other types of bizarre and barbaric ritualism along with the progress of the Hindutva juggernaut which is rolling on, leaving a trail of communal carnage in its wake. The present to Mr Advani and his willing acceptance, of bowls full of human blood is gruesome. Also ominous is the "symbolic" offering of weapons which the BJP MP, Mr Pramod Mahajan, gleefully accepted with the remarks that "if all the arms presented so far (the third day of the *yatra*) were used, the Ayodhya issue would be settled in a day."

It is infiltration of ideology through ritual symbolism that represents the continuum between the Mandal and the mandir issues. The iniquities of caste and the obscurantism of irrational rituals are integrally connected in *Sanatanist* Hinduism. The inherent and inequitous hierarchy of caste has been maintained for centuries through Brahmanical control over rituals, in particular over rites of passage, over birth and death. Blood-letting and sacrifice, subservience and deprivation of life are essential ingredients of the hierarchical orthodox Hindu order which negates the egalitarian urges of modern civil society.

To the extent that the anti-Mandal agitation is a reflection of the attempt to perpetuate plutocracy and the mandir issue is one of irrational, socially divisive, aggressive and ritualistic Hindutva, the two are in effect the backward movements of the so-called "forward" . If they succeed, they will only encourage primitivism in a modern age.

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

Mandal Commission Controversy

V.M TARKUNDE

The announcement made by the Prime Minister that the Government would implement the Mandal Commission Report as from 7th of August, 1990 has caused a storm of protest, particularly in northern India. Student riots have taken place in Bihar and they have spread to some centres in U.P., Delhi and Orissa. The issues arising from the acceptance of the Mandal Commission Report require a dispassionate consideration.

The Mandal Commission found after an elaborate enquiry that the percentage of Other Backward Classes (OBCs excluding Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) in India is about 52%. While the reservations granted in favour of Scheduled Castes (15%) and Scheduled Tribes (7.5%) are in proportion to their percentage in the total population in the country, the reservation proposed to be granted in favour of OBCs is only half the percentage of their population. The Mandal Commission restricted reservation in favour of OBCs to 27% because the Supreme Court had recommended in the wellknown Balaji case that the total reservation should as far as possible not exceed 50%. Although the Mandal Commission had recommended the reservation of OBCs in the government employment and employment in public sector undertakings as well as in higher educational institutions,

the present announcement of the Prime Minister is confined to government jobs and jobs in public sector undertakings. It is very likely, however, that before long the same percentage of reservation will be granted to the OBCs in the higher educational institutions.

Two substantial objections have been advanced to the policy of reservations in the jobs available in governmental institutions and public sector undertakings. It is urged, in the first place, the reservation of nearly 50% of the jobs on the basis of caste instead of merit is bound to affect the efficiency of the services. The second objection is that the reserved seats are being monopolised by the more advanced families in the backward communities, with the result that the egalitarian objective of the policy of reservation is largely defeated.

In regard to the first objection based in loss of efficiency, although there is undoubtedly some truth in it, the extent of the inefficiency arising out of the policy of reservation appears to be greatly exaggerated. It is well known that a higher percentage of reservation than what is recommended by the Mandal Commission has been operative for more than two decades in the southern Indian States and nobody has observed that the efficiency of government services in southern India is less than that in the north. For several years the total reservation in government jobs for SC, ST and OBCs has been 66% in Karnataka and 68% in Tamil Nadu. The total reservations recommended by the Mandal Commission comes to 49.5%. The objection taken on the ground of efficiency is therefore not so material as it appears.

The second objection to the policy of reservation is, however, far more substantial. The objection has two aspects. In the first place, the advantage of the reservation is monopolised by a few relatively advanced families in the community to which reservation is available. Secondly, there are numerous sub-castes in all the communities for which reservation has been extended, namely, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. In each of these communities, some of the sub-castes are comparatively less backward than others. For instance, among the Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra,

Mahars and Chamars are relatively more advanced than other Scheduled Castes, such as Mangs, Dheds, Vadaris, etc. Most of the reserved posts therefore go to the sub-castes like Mahars and Chamars and hardly any advantage is received by those belonging to the more backward sub-castes. Some provision is therefore necessary in order that the bulk of the reserved posts should not be monopolised by the more advanced members of S.C., S.T. and OBCs.

The Mandal Commission was well aware of this problem, but it has virtually swept it under the carpet. "It is observed, "It is no doubt true that the major benefits of reservation and other welfare measures for Other Backward Classes will be cornered by the more advanced section of the backward communities. But is not this not this a universal phenomenon? All reformist remedies have to contend with a slow recovery along the hierarchical gradient; there are no quantum jumps in social reform. Moreover, human nature being what it is, a new class' ultimately does emerge even in classless societies." It is clear that the Mandal Commission has offered no solution to this problem, but has indulged in generalisations to sidetrack the issue.

In emphasising the main advantage of the policy of reservation, the Commission has said: "In India, government service has always been looked upon as a symbol of prestige and power. By increasing the representation of OBCs in government services, we give them an immediate feeling of participation in the governance of this country. When a backward class candidate becomes a Collector or a Superintendent of Police, the material benefits accruing from his position are limited to the members of his family only. But the psychological spin off of this phenomenon tremendous: the entire community of that backward class candidates feels socially elevated." This is certainly a very pertinent observation, but it overlooks the fact that OBCs consist of various communities and if a candidate belonging to one community becomes a Collector or a Superintendent of Police, members of that particular community will feel socially elevated, but it will have little impact for members of other backward communities.

particularly when they are more backward than the community whose member has come to occupy the high post.

In order to ensure that the reserved posts are not monopolised by the more advanced sections of the backward communities, it has often been suggested that reservations should be available to members of only those families in the backward communities whose annual income is below a certain figure. This suggestion is in the right direction but is hardly capable of being effectively implemented. It is difficult to ascertain the annual income of many families belonging to SC, ST and OBCs. It is necessary to prescribe a more easily ascertainable text for excluding a candidate from the advantage of reservation. For instance, it can be provided that a candidate belonging to SC, ST and OBC will not be entitled to the benefit of reservation if any member of his family has occupied a class I or Class II post in government service or any service of a public sector undertaking, or if a member of his family has become a doctor or advocate, or if the family pays income tax or owns agricultural land above a certain acreage. It is understood that a suggestion in these lines has been made by Justice Chinnappa Reddy, a former Judge of the Supreme Court, in a report on the reservation policy submitted by him to the Government of Karnataka.

It cannot be denied that the policy of reservation does cause a good deal of injustice to candidates of merit belonging to communities other than the SC, ST and OBCs. The injustice is greater when the policy of reservation is implemented in higher educational institutions, particularly in medical and engineering colleges. The injustice has to be tolerated for the time being in the larger social interest, but its period should not be unduly extended. Social and educational backwardness should not be allowed to become a permanent source of benefit. Reservation was initially visualised for a period of ten years, but it has now continued for over 40 years and the end is not yet in sight. Reservation is necessary so long as certain communities remain extremely backward compared to other sections of society. But it must be realised that reservation cannot be the principal means for bringing about an advancement of the backward communities. Spread of educa-

tion is the effective remedy for the removal of social backwardness. It is the failure of our educational policy which is the main cause for the indefinite prolongation of the reservation policy.

In this connection, the Mandal Commission has rightly recommended that an intensive and timebound programme for adult education should be launched, particularly in areas where there is a concentration of backward communities. It is a common experience that illiterate parents do not take serious interest in educating their children. However, a more potent cause for the neglect of children's education is the poverty of their families. Poor families are required to secure some part-time work for their children in order to supplement the family income. Primary and a part of the secondary education is already free in most of the country. In some States, free meals are provided to the students and that is a very useful device for preventing dropouts. What is necessary, however, is to provide scholarships on a monthly basis to all the students belonging to the SC, ST and OBCs. This will involve a lot of expenditure but adequate finance would be available if we divert a part of our unduly bloated military budget for promoting primary and the secondary education of the backward communities. The necessity of reservations may disappear in a couple of decades if greater attention is given and adequate resources are made available for primary and secondary education of children belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Communities.

August 19, 1990.

V.M.T.

Postscript

For the last three days college and school students in Delhi have resorted to a "Rasta Roko" agitation in protest against the announcement of the Central Government that it has decided to implement the Medical Commission Report. Almost the entire press has supported the student's movement. It is alleged in the press that the Mandal Commission Report is casteist in character and that the Central Government is fomenting casteism by accepting the same. An appeal by

two Central ministers to the backward communities to launch a counter demonstration in support of the Report is condemned in the press as a dangerous move to divide the country. The implication is that the backward communities should meekly submit to the pressure tactics of the students belonging to the advanced communities and the press organs which support them, and should give up the reservations which have been promised to them by the Mandal Commission and in the election manifesto of the National Front.

A little reflection will show that the charge of casteism and of dividing the country leveled against the Mandal Commission and the Central Government is quite unjustified. To recognise the fact that several communities in the country, other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, are extremely backward in education and social status is not a sign of casteism. Nor is it a sign of casteism to give them preferential treatment in order to bring them up to the level of the rest of the society. These communities are socially and educationally backward because of their extreme poverty. No caste or community which is economically at a level with the rest of our society should be allowed to claim that it is socially and educationally backward. If any such caste or community is included in the list of other Backward Classes, a demand for its deletion from the list will be justified. Moreover, as suggested earlier, the more advanced families in the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes should also be denied the advantage of reservations. While such alterations in the Mandal commission's Report are legitimate, the demand for its wholesale rejection on the ground of casteism has no justification whatever. On the contrary, it can be truthfully said that many of those belonging to the upper castes, who are vehemently opposing the Mandal Commission Report on the streets on through the press, are acting, knowingly or unknowingly, under the influence of caste-based sentiments.

New Delhi

V.M.T.

August 29, 1990.

Courtesy : *The Radical Humanist*.

IRAQI ANNEXATION OF KUWAIT :

Threat To World Order

The armed forces of Iraq under the command of 53-year old Saddam Hussein at-Takriti invaded its tiny southern neighbour Kuwait in the early hours of August 2 on the plea of coming to the aid of 'revolutionary youth in Kuwait' who had toppled the Government and set up a new administration. Nobody in the world, particularly in the other Arab states, accepted this white lie because of the following wellknown facts :

- * the Iraqi Government abruptly broke off reconciliation talks between Iraq and Kuwait at Jiddah in Saudi Arabia on August 1, 1990 in connection with the dispute raised by Iraq only two weeks ago over borders, oil and revenue sharing. ;
- * after announcing withdrawal of its troops from Kuwait from August 5, it floated a provisional government of Kuwait headed by Col. Alla Hussein Ali, son-in-law of Saddam Hussein and an officer of the Iraqi army ;
- * it annexed Kuwait by a declaration on August 8.

August at such flagrant violation of accepted norms of civilized international behaviour, the UN Security Council, on August 2, condemned the Iraqi invasion and appealed to Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. In the absence of compliance with this appeal and in view of further provocative acts and statements from the Iraqi Government, the UN Security Council imposed economic sanction against Iraq on August 6. It called on the member countries to cut off financial aid and trade relations with Iraq and to cause supplying it with arms.

The matter did not end there. Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad al-Jabir as-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait, fled the country and took shelter in neighbouring Saudi Arabia. Apprehending invasion and annexation, the Saudi Government sought assistance from other friendly states. In response, several governments, including those of Britain, France, USA, extended prompt military support in defence of Saudi Arabia. On August 10, 21-member Arab League decided to send an Arab force to protect Saudi Arabia against the threat of Iraqi invasion when their

earlier appeal to Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait was ignored. Even Pakistan and Bangladesh have extended military support to Saudi Arabia.

As a counter move to Arab League decision, Saddam Hussien suggested on August 12 that he would tie any Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait to an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip and Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. He also proposed replacement of US and foreign forces by Arab forces as a first stage in defusing the Gulf crisis. According to this proposal, Iraq and Soudi Arabia should decide which countries to contribute troops and the forces should be under the UN Security Council. The purpose of this proposal was to throw dust in the eye of the Arab people and delay vacation of occupation of Kuwait.

Not a single state in the Arab land has expressed support for Iraqi annexation of Kuwait. Out of fear for their own security and independence, some of them did not come forward to denounce the Iraqi action. For the same consideration, Hussein I, king of Jordan, is frantically jetting from one capital to another for peaceful settlement of the snow-balling danger for all the Arab countries and the world. For him, the actions of Iraq are of specific significance as his resourceless tiny country is sandwiched between beligerent Israel and Iraq, and obviously he has not forgotten that his cousin Faisal II of Iraq was killed together with his family members in July 1958 and the monarchy was overthrown by a group of Iraqi army officers with the support from the Arab Renaissance Socialist Party (Baath Party) of Iraq, of which Saddam Hussien is the all powerful Secretary General now.

Finding that Iraq has lost confidence of other Arab states and an international force is building up on Arab soil, which will compel him to withdraw from Kuwait and abandon his ambition of exercising hegemonistic power over other Arab states and dictating terms to other countries of the world.

A threatened elite

AJIT BHATTACHARJEA

Fears of caste violence that continue to be voiced after the National Front government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission report, recall the adage of one man sitting on another's chest and complaining that the victim is threatening violence when he tries to free himself. An updated version would have the bully insist that the victim would behave like him if he got the chance.

In all probability, the more forward of the other backward classes will try to grab the few administrative plums made available. Ways can be devised to give additional weightage to the most backward, as is done in some states. But the relative clout of the forward among the OBCs cannot excuse the hypocritical stance of those who use it as an excuse to justify the virtual monopoly the privileged classes have enjoyed of prize government appointments, with all the status and influence they bring for over 40 years, by denying education to the majority.

The report faces the criticism squarely. "The chief merit of reservation," it notes, "is not that it will introduce egalitarianism amongst OBCs when the rest of Indian society is seized of all sorts of inequalities. But reservation will certainly erode the hold of higher castes on the services and enable OBCs in

general to have a sense of participation in running the affairs of their country.”

Mandal uses class and caste almost synonymously. The reason he gives is that social and educational backwardness and poverty are a direct consequence of “crippling caste-based handicaps. As these handicaps are deeply embedded in our social structure, their removal will require far-reaching structural changes”. He does not accuse politicians directly, but the hypocrisy is patent of those who condemn the caste system while fortifying it by choosing candidates on the basis of caste and appealing to caste sentiment when electrioneering.

The central thrust of the report should be born in mind to appreciate its recommendations. It is that “equality is only among equals. To treat unequals as equals is to perpetuate inequality. It is ‘equality of results’ which is the acid test of society’s egalitarian pretensions. It is only by giving special protection and privileges to the underprivileged section of society that we can enable the weak to resist exploitation by the strong”.

Among the upper castes, too, there are forwards, like the Brhamins, who despite their miniscule numbers, have enjoyed the biggest share of senior government jobs ; and this has been a cause for complaint by the others. But all are united in opposing arrangements for the majority of the population to participate. And so, refuge is taken in so-called merit, which in effect means qualifications designed to favour the socially advantaged.

Indeed, the orchestrated reaction of those whose privileges are threatened indicate the emergence of a nepotistic super elite caste, who have internalised the colonial administrative steel frame psyche, and see senior government appointments as their right. Inter marriage, inter-dining, a common anglicised culture and a deeply-rooted sense of superiority weld them, and their hanger-on, together. The logic of numbers, inherent in democracy, is projected as an invitation to chaos when the exploited majority begins to realise its electoral strength. It is then countered by violence, or the threat of

violence, recently expressed by bringing business to a standstill, attacks on public transport and extorted donations.

Efforts to evolve an all-party consensus on the Mandal report and the debate in Parliament show what could have happened if such consultations had been attempted before announcing implementation. As in the decade that has passed since the report was presented, its implementation would have been delayed indefinitely on one excuse or other, without daring to oppose it frontally. Now, since the government is showing no signs of retreating from the basic commitment, clearly enunciated in its manifesto, to reserve 27 percent of posts in the privileged central services and public sector for the OBCs (who constitute 52 percent of the population), the attack is focussed on prime minister V.P. Singh, who is also the prime renegade because he belongs to the upper castes.

V.P. Singh's motives are obviously mixed, as the timing of the announcement on the eve of former deputy prime minister Devi Lal's rally indicated. But the party manifesto and other measures taken since January show it was not a tactic pulled abruptly out of a hat. He is striving to put together a coalition capable of challenging the Congress-I, the BJP and other traditional representatives of the haves. It extends to the minorities, especially the Muslims, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (by insisting that the existing reservations for them be filled) and the numerous OBCs.

What is socially significant, apart from electoral calculations, is that the coalition is by and large a combination of the relatively oppressed and havenots, which should also attract liberals. It is hard to say how much V.P. Singh is influenced by this consideration; but it does not appear marginal. The sentiments expressed on Independence Day were tinged with sincerity.

Even so, it is true that these sentiments, expressing limited objectives, do not seem part of a comprehensive, planned programme for structural change. We do not know the next step to be taken after the Mandal report. Quite possibly, the prime minister has not worked it out himself. That is the job of party ideologists.

The leader of a democratic government is not required to

possess such a holistic vision. That is to misinterpret his role. He and his Cabinet form the funnel through which diverse social forces are channelled into policy-making ; the point at which they impact on history. The style, and expectation, of a supreme national leader was set during the struggle for independence, when it was needed. Science Jawaharlal Nehru spanned the pre-and post-independence period, he carried over, not always to India's benefit, the omniscient visionary style which was a transference from the past, not a function of the present.

The induced frenzy over reservations has diverted attention from other important aspects of the Mandal. It contains comprehensive recommendations for special education facilities, vocational training and coaching facilities to upgrade the cultural environment of OBC students and enable them to catch up with others.

The suggestions are not limited to education and reservation of jobs. Special programmes and subsidised loans for village artisans are recommended. For this, state governments are asked to set up a separate network of financial and technical institutions. These should not be overlooked.

The structural changes recommended go further to stress the "mental and material bondgae" of the OBCs by the rich peasantry, which is possible why the rich farmers' organisations are not too happy. Without "structural changes and progressive land reforms implemented rigorously all over the country, "the report states, "OBCs will never become truly independent."

A few excerpts from the recommendations, which are supported by surveys and quantitative analyses, reflect the basic approach to its task. This was to "determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes" and "to recommend steps to be taken for (their) advancement."

"Castes...have kept Hindu society divided in a hierachical order for centuries. This has resulted in a close linkage between the caste rankings of a person and his social, educational and economic status. This manner of stratification of society gave the higher castes deep-rooted vested interests in the perpetuation of the system." (Apparently, B.P. Mandal himself

though the son of a big landowner, was not allowed to sit with upper caste children in his village school).

“It is generally agreed that whereas certain caste taboos have weakened...the importance of casteism in Indian politics is on the increase...What caste has lost on the ritual front, it has more than gained on the political front”.

“Merit itself is largely a product of favourable environmental privileges and higher rating in an examination does not necessarily reflect higher intrinsic worth of the examinee. The element of privilege should be fully recognised and discounted for when ‘unequals’ are made to run the same race”.

Finally, to remove a continuing misconception. “As Article 340 of the Constitution speaks of ‘socially and educationally backward classes,’ the application of ‘economic tests’ for their identification seems to be misconceived.”

Courtesy : Independent

Merit : Reflections on a Rhetoric

BIKRAM N. NANDA AND MOHAMMAD TALIB

The campaign against the Mandal Commission speaks a universal language. But underneath its froth and fume, in its rhetorics of 'merit', 'efficiency' and 'excellence,' concealed under the facade of universality, there are strong currents of particularisms. We want to bring out but one such particularism pertaining to the plea for merit. We address ourselves to the fact that merit is not merely an individual attribute but an attribute which is socially derived and even determined.

This raises questions that go beyond the social definition of merit. Merit is not merely seen as a social and cultural construction but more importantly, as something which is appropriated by the elite sections that exploit material and cultural surplus. So that the acquisition of merit by some sections that are privileged, also entails the certified degradation of whatever merit the other sections possess. Merit like the flame of a *dia* that illumines the world around it, perpetuates a permanent world of darkness right on the ground upon which it rests. And this circle of darkness seems to increase with the increase in the luminosity of the flame. The brighter the flame of meritocracy the greater has been the fall-out of its darkness. Have we not had meritorious civilisations erected on the vast continents of darkness ?

And again, to pursue the metaphor of the burning lamp, the flame that dazzles contains within itself a dark core — a logistics of merit outwitting itself. The flame not only burns up the wick but the very substance which makes it possible. Like the flame of the *dia*, merit as we know it, has that tendency. We are not referring here to the propensity of a genius to suicide but the suicidal tendencies in civilisation themselves. Have we not reached that situation where a flash of radioactive light can spell the finality of all merit? In the past, civilisations have strived for merit but ours is a civilisation so meritorious that it threatens the possibility of a posterity to be able to reflect upon merit itself.

On the balance book of merits and de-merits, our civilisational performance has been pathetically poor. Our potential for overkill and undernourish are but stray epochal motifs that ironically coexist with our merit to conquer the atom, enslave ecology and colonise humanity. We may be meritorious but our record must seem impoverished to our posterity if at all there is one. But this is not the moment to stray into matters unmeritorious. We would merely like to state here that the question of merit in all its concreteness rarely gets interrogated. The frenzy over a policy document might just thrust upon us the need to concretise our manners and habits of thinking about merit. And in so doing there is a likelihood that clarification might emerge about the dominant conceptions of merit we referred to in the civilisational imperatives. However, for the moment we would like to confine ourselves to the way the Mandal Commission Report poses the issue of merit in its chapter entitled *Social Justice, Merit and Privilege* (p. 28).

The Report juxtaposes two typical case histories. Mohan comes from a well of middle class family brought up by well educated parents. He attends a good public school in the city and cultivates an array of interests including extra-curricular activities. Within his domestic space he has a study room to himself. Mohan has access to not only a whole network of well-placed relatives and family friends, he inherits an

entire symbolic patrimony where television, radio and the culture of information are social facts.

*Mandal contrasts Mohan's profile with that of Lallu, a village boy from the lower echelons of caste hierarchy. Huddled into a two-roomed hut, Lallu has no space that he can call his own. He walks three kilometers to attend his high school. When Lallu comes to the *tehsil* headquarters for higher studies he is housed with an indifferent uncle. His peer group in the middle school is left behind. A fish out of water, Lallu's rural predisposition and rustic appearance obviously reflect in his pronunciation, his awkward manner and lack of self confidence.

In the All India Civil Services examination Mohan secures fifty per cent more marks than Lallu. The Mandal Commission Report raises the following issue and we quote :

What we call merit in an elitist society is an amalgam of native endowments and environmental privileges. Mohan and Lallu are not equals' in any fair sense of the term and it will be unfair to judge them by the same yard-stick. The conscience of a civilised society and the dictates of social justice demand that 'merit' and equality are not turned into a fetish and the element of privilege is duly recognised and discounted for when 'unequals' are made to run the same race. (p. 28)

This spells out the crux of Mandal's argument on merit. There are three recognitions that are significant here. First, merit is not an individual gift. It is, at least as we know it, socially conditioned. If it manifests itself as an individual trait then it is because the acquisition are socially available. Secondly, the above illustration demonstrates a significant subsidy that is socially available in abundance to Mohan, and Lallu stands socially disadvantaged. Without access to that social subsidy, there can scarcely be any acquisition of merit. This takes us to the third recognition that de-facto there is in reality a reservation already in operation, whereby certain sections by virtue of their social position privilege themselves (perforce such a reservation ante dates the welfare's state which reserve life chances for the underprivileged). One sociologist of education, Basil Bernstein, had called this subsidy as local pedagogic space. The home, the domestic environment and the entire symbolic patrimony complimented the school (which

Bernstein prefers to call the official pedagogic pace). No sociologist of education would dispute that school cannot replace home.

Based upon these recognitions the Report provides an entire repertoire of recommendations. Among the recommendations, it is the issue of reservations which has generated the current sound and fury. Let us recall the illustration. The Report hopes to overcome the gap between Mohan and Lallu by giving the latter a charitable "pull" so that he does not fall behind in the race between the unequa's. At the same time, Mohan has been urged to exercise restraint so that in his meritorious strides he doesn't overtake the 'backward' Lallu. But in this race the cherished value of meritocracy, that finishing line of excellence, remains and unquestioned given. Lallu will have to carry the burden of the label 'backward' in the eyes of Mohan and in his own eyes. This is the label which his children will also inherit (no matter how much they despise their classification). The dependency reservations generate, the habit of looking upto *sarkar* for support which is likely to instil in the consciousness of the beneficiaries the gesture of benevolence, is an area of silence. And this is a silence that is by no means insignificant. But here we want to draw attention towards other silences surrounding the question of merit.

*Let us return to Lallu. Lallu's case presented in the Report is a significant but only part of Lallu's reality. The other part is left out. And we need to draw attention to this other aspect because any diagnosis of the malaise is liable to prescribe insufficient medicines if we detect only half of the symptoms. Again, there is a need to identify the roots of a social pathology, even if we are keen to cure an ailment, leave alone preventing it. It should not be that the kidney is mistaken for the heart, for supporting the patient on dialysis is not going to improve the cardiac condition.

Lallu is not an individual but a condition of society. And in such a society, as is in our case, education is by and large an institution that formalises failure. Still attracted by the lure of education, that promises to alleviate conditions of life, a vast section in the lower age cohort respects the flame of merit. But every time it comes close to the illuminating glare,

it drops off. They may be statistical figures in the account books of the Human Resource Development Ministry but in reality they constitute that vast circle of darkness under the flame of success. The torch-light of proficiency and excellence which they forerunners of nation-building adorn, leaving behind a potential constituency, can scarcely light up zones of darkness.

No rhetoric of merit can justify our inability to harness the genius of the unmeritorious that totters like a battered soul in the uncertain alleyways and yet doesn't give up. Alexander the great, the steam engine, the Pied-piper, two-plus-two equals-four, etc. may not excite Lallu's survival instincts, not at least the way the trained subject teachers are full of. Lallu's tiny head might seem to be full of 'chaff' as far as school exams are concerned, yet he knows other excitements. He may not know how to relate to the weather bulletin of *char mahaganron ke tapman*, or the city with the highest rainfall, but he can feel the exuberance of the easterly breeze that blows over and heralds the coming of monsoons. If Lallu comes from the backward highlands of, say Koraput in southern Orrissa. then, at the age of eight he can distinguish between eighty different hill slopes, and with reasonable consistency speculate the quantum of yield at millet harvest. The preparatory panic among ants signals for him the impending shower. He may not perform well at school but failure to distinguish between the palatable and poisonous mushrooms or for that matter berries, can make the difference between life and death.

Lallu's awareness of environment, the genius in the calculus of survivals and the repertoire of strategies to safeguard life against the cruel caprices of social and natural calamities is a resource that education fails to recognise, let alone nourish. If Lallu is carpenter's or a blacksmith's or a potter's or a brass-maker's son, his survival still depends upon a mastery of a traditional craft transmitted to him by his father who in turn received his apprenticeship through an arduous process of trial and error as also eye estimation. That art and craft of making a living which sociologists call an occupational specialisation is essentially a set of proficiencies handed down through generations and distilled through decades of practical training.

The curriculum of the triple Rs can neither organise the practical experiences nor can it resolve existential and immediate contradictions in Lallu's predicament. The abstract categories in the class room, the imaginary discourse we call education, and the 'objective' evaluation—all have a distant remoteness and an intagibility for Lallu, not inspite put *because* of his proficiency in the reality of life itself. The treacherous conditions of life that threatens Lallu's survival, let alone a standard of living, pre-suppose a mastery which the village school master is ill-equipped to understand.

*Simply the vernacular literacy in the art of survival doesn't deserve the preface 'backward'. Perforce in a curious irony, the classification classifies the classifier. Lallu's trajectory and the charitable 'pull' of reservation is indeed a sad commentary on our state of affairs. And this is a state that arises out of the competitive culture of the Darwinian jungle relegating cultural competencies, folk wisdom, traditional skills, customary cooperative processes, environmental awareness, etc. And then, we ask how can the performance of our institutions be preserved if reservations are to be implemented? Of course, the functioning of our institutions will suffer unless we redefine the meaning of many of our institutions, and the meaning of merit. And above all, radically change the structure of our society which includes an entire range of qualitative transformations.

The present state and status of the so-called OBCs will continue to remain subordinate unless rigorous alterations are sincerely implemented through, as the Mandal Commission admits, universalisation of elementary education, special educational facilities, environmental education, vocational training, upgrading traditional skills and competencies, subsidised technical facilities for rural artisans, and, above all, reforms in the existing land relations. To implement reservations for the OBCs without the concomitant conditions suggested by the Commission, we can only hope to prove, in practice, the worst fears of the anti-Mandalites. And this is because in a country where more than half the population is non-literate, reservations in jobs that presuppose high proficiency in the art of literacy can only defeat the desired goal. But without discriminatory protection, given the structure of inequality equality of access to jobs, opportunities and industrial and business facilities amounts

to the denial of justice. Without radical reforms, reservations can scarcely alleviate poverty. At best, such a measure will manage poverty and at worst, it would perpetuate it.

It goes without saying that the production, perpetuation and the cultivation of merit among the meritorious is necessarily made possible by a generation of social surplus that the unmeritorious labour find hard to provide. If not for anything, at least by way of accountability, there should be a court of appeal where those who make the meritorious possible can be recognised and heard. It is no mark of merit to refuse to understand. As of course it is sad that the battle-lines have been drawn and the grey areas have been dissolved, jettisoning the ailment through a forced certificate of fitness, because the medicine is unpalatable. The health of merit has been too malignant. The symptoms have been far too many.

Thrust upon us by zealous political contingencies and compulsions, the implementation of Mandal's recommendations necessitate a national debate about a very vital imperative in our national reconstruction. It makes very little sense to say that Kashmir is burning or that Punjab, Assam and the North-East are out of hand. Again, it is ludicrous to divert attention by signalling that this or that neighbour is interfering too much in our domestic affairs. We are tired of these reminders. There is no dearth of issues to address ourselves but we can ill-afford to turn our backs on the merits and de-merits of the desired destination of meritocracy. At best, we can be poor imitators of civilisations that have outlived their relevance and at worst, caricature with heavy costs, an imported illusion against which the freedom fighters had sacrificed their lives.

This is by no means a national question. If we are serious to conduct ourselves in the spirit of a cooperative discourse and debate over the issues that are at stake we may well provide exemplary signal to an international constituency. The constituency includes, for instance, the Blacks who are across the Atlantic and for whom tenders in the classified columns have to indicate reservations so that after eight generations, on the soil of the most meritorious country, they may not be left out.

Lost, but not least, Indian polity has displayed a remarkable ability at reproducing popular slogans and surmises promising

justice for the deprived. When a certain repertoire of popular rhetoric gets hackneyed it is replaced by another. Political slogans, if devoid of moral commitment to what is professed, rapidly become transparent at least for those who invest real meanings. Then, slogans lapse into dull doleful sounds. The life of the polity itself begins to threaten the lives of those whose conditions polity was supposed to alleviate. If promises stand shorn of all political will then two sets of consequences are likely. Either the death of promises drives hope to the brink of hopelessness (sociologists call it Anomie). Or in that twilight of political malaise, if not the death of the polity, the more practical instincts of real deprivation reserve for themselves their own prerogatives.

Caste In A New Light

Frictional Co-Efficient of Mandal

JUG SURAIYA

“In that empire...the art of cartography sketched a map... which was the size of the empire and coincided at every point with it. The following generations comprehended that this dilated map was useless and...delivered it to the inclemencies of the sun-in the deserts there remain piecemeal ruins of the map inhabited by animals and beggars. In the entire rest of the country, there is no vestige left of the geographical disciplines.” So says Suarez Miranda, the 17th century Spanish fabulist.

At the forefront of the current anti-reservation agitation are many of those convinced that caste is a matter of consenting adults in the private parameters of matrimonial columns, and as such any attempt to bring the issue into the public domain is by definition pernicious and retrogressive, energetically to be opposed by all liberals and other right-thinking people. The lurking mofussil is seen to be cracking through the fragile veneer of the metropolitan facade ; grotesque Hyde erupting out of the suave features of Dr Jekyll in the midst of an elegant soiree.

Anti-Caste Crusade

The unacceptable other face of our modern masquerade poses a dilemma : if he who is without caste were to hurl the first stone, the anti-caste crusade would find itself sorely lacking in ammunition. A more meritorious *causa bellum* has been found for the good fight, and what better war cry than merit itself, beleaguered citadel surrounded by a hostile sea of growing inefficiency. Efficiency, which is another word for progress, becomes a perfect mantra with which selectively to exorcise the spectre of reservations ; a sort of moral neutron bomb which while dematerialising troublesome inhabitants leaves intact the structures the enclose them and which can be but to future use.

Thus commentators who otherwise are more than accommodative when it comes to the Hindu rate of inertia now discover a new virtue in efficiency, selfless handmaiden to democracy and secularism. The ruinous cost of the reservation policy is totted up on the abacus of arithmetical rhetoric : If fifty per cent of government and public sector jobs add up to caste plus lack of merit (efficiency), of which sum only forty per cent is available in the first year, by the second year the projected co-inefficient rises to sixty per cent, then to seventy, and after that to *eighty* ! (Emphases and exclamation marks both mine.) A dire reckoning indeed.

Anyone who has tried to get a file through a government department, cash a cheque in a nationalised bank or witnessed a member of a Scheduled Caste or Tribe walk past the sign-board of an SC/ST medical practitioner to find another doctor knows the price we have paid already for inefficiency, a traditional commodity of which there is no death of export surplus. Can we afford to add to our overwhelming stocks of this truly gross national product ? Certainly not. But precisely because we can't perhaps we must.

The problem with efficiency of course is efficiency of whom, by whom and for whom. "The trains ran on time," has proved the epitaph of many experiments in efficiency, from II Duce's *risorgiment* to Indira Gandhi's Emergency. Behavioral scientists define intelligence, the efficient utilisation of mental resources, as "problem-solving capacity". An Eskimo,

whose vocabulary includes 17 words for different varieties of Wall snow, can negotiate an icy slope with as much efficiency as a Street financier negotiating the slippery precipice of an arbitrage transaction. But what if Eskimo and financier were to compete on common ground? Relative efficiency would be determined by who set the context within which the problem was to be solved.

For many years, American Blacks would score consistently lower than White candidates in IQ tests. This was assumed to indicate that Blacks were, through nature, or nature inferior to Whites in items of cognition. Some researchers, however, noted that the questions invariably were set by Whites, and the tests were conducted in what was perceived by the examinees, to be a White environment. When questions were set by Blacks, in a Black environment, the Black candidates did significantly better. Such findings challenged traditional theories of intelligence and education, and suggested that the aptitude to solve problems did not exist in a cultural or social vacuum. In fact, very often the social environment *was* the problem.

Punitive Measures

Efficiency is as efficiency does, often at the expense of others. To Dr Joseph Ignace Guillotin, his invention was the most efficient and humane way to terminate human life so as to provide a salutary example of punitive measure and public deterrent. To the other party concerned, the person about to have his or her head chopped off, guillotine was a most inefficient way of ensuring that punitive measures and deterrents would not be needed in future. Triple bypass surgery is an efficient way of prolonging the life of a Dallas --or Delhi--magnate suffering the karmic coronary consequence of his efficiency; to a child dying of diarrhoea because of lack of safe drinking water, a bypass operation is a most inefficient way of extending the frontiers of science and medical technology to prolong *his* life.

The benefic calculus of efficiency is value biased. If the scientist is the atom's way of finding out about their own limitless potential, this opened enterprise is short-circuited

by the technocrat who would define human well-being in terms of so many pounds of hardware per head of population. God may or may not play dice with the universe, but homo efficacious, does and the dice he uses are loaded. All too often, efficiency means the most efficient way of distributing deprivation.

Norman Mailer said the American tragedy was that they go to the moon and did not know what they were doing there. Our plight is not that we haven't got to our own moon, but that we don't know what are doing not being there. Leave us to God or to anarchy, cried out Gandhi to the British. They went one better and sought to leave us to both. But the "appalling strangeness" of God's mercy is increasingly at odds with our avowed secularism, and the anarchy that might have proved to be the turbulence of inchoate hope has long lapsed into what Amartya Sen calls a "quiet hunger" overlooked in the distraction of more calmorous crises.

Social Darwinism

This "quiet hunger," which provides the forgotten underpinning of both the accepted order and the equally accepted disorder of things, is the real "inefficiency" in which all of us above the "efficiency" line have a stake. The prosperous farmer's efficiently subsidised fertiliser owes its efficacy at least in part to the undoubted inefficiency of the marginalised cultivator and the landless peasant. The organised sector's efficiency in organising itself, if nothing else, is aided and abetted by the patent inefficiency of the unorganised sector to do likewise. The efficiency of high-rise buildings, is maintained by the adjacent inefficiency of shantytowns that supply the necessary menial and other services.

Is the efficient the inefficient's way of finding out its own potential? Social Darwinism might suggest so. The great white shark, which can detect a single drop of blood in a hundred gallons of water at a range of half a mile, is efficiency incarnate. But the tapering snout of the perfect predator symbolises its evolutionary dead end; it has remained unchanged for 20 million years. The dinosaurs weren't so lucky; they proved so efficient at maximising dominance that their environment could no longer support them and they were swallowed up in their own efficiency.

Indian society is sometimes compared to a dinosaur. But it is really more like an amoeba ; protean, adaptable, capable of sustaining itself on virtually nothing, an organism that has nowhere to go but up the evolutionary ladder by incorporating as many disparate — and perhaps desperate — strands as possible.

Mandal might turn out to be the amoeba's attempt to realise its full potential, however efficiently or otherwise remains to be seen.

Whose standards are they anyway?

MARI MARCEL THEKAEKARA

In the wake of the anti-reservation stir, the author who works with tribals in the Nilgiris, questions the double standards of the Indian media and society.

In hundreds of small towns all over India, human beings still carry on their heads, what in government terminology is called night soil. Ordinarily, it is known as shit. This is a *privilege* accorded to them by virtue of their birth. That privilege does not arouse concern in most of the editors of our national dailies.

Milions of people throughout our country take it for granted that babies born in India today have written on their foreheads, by divine decree if you like, that they are destined to be carriers of night soil. Destined to clean latrines handle rotting carassess and sweep the streets for the rest of their lives. This is the rest of their lives. This is the birthright of these children.. Their *privilege*. By divine ordination and human concurrence.

After Independence, when our Constitution was being written, there were people at the helm of affairs who believed that their fellow countrymen deserved a better deal. They talked about justice, equality and fraternity. At that point in

history, people were employing mere rhetoric. They meant what they said. They talked about correcting the wrongs of the past. Of bringing into the mainstream, people who had been oppressed for centuries for no fault of their own. The young nation, savouring its newly tasted freedom felt generous towards its downtrodden. Gandhiji, Nehru and Ambedkar set the moral tone of the day. And the fibre of the nation was different.

Thus was born the policy of reservation. In language which stirred the soul and moved the entire nation, the architects of our country explained why a people whose psyche has been scarred by centuries of degradation, needed to be pulled out of the mire of poverty and exploitation in which society had enslaved them.

Over forty years have passed. The vision of our founding fathers remains a distant dream. In villages in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, harijans are killed for daring to dream of a different existence for their children. Young girls are raped because feudal landlords still consider harijan virgins as theirs for deflowering when they come of age. The atrocities are endless. These, however, are considered as boring and are tucked away obscurely as insignificant news items.

But this is not what I wish to talk about. I want to talk about privilege. And promotion at different levels. Which is what some eminent journalists have talked about. But I want to view it from the other side of the fence.

I wish to point out that this country of ours, like a lot of other countries, works according to a system of privilege which is tacit and unstated. A system unlike that of reservation for SCs and STs which is explicit, underlined and proclaimed from the rooftops.

The elite who like to think of themselves as the cream of the nation, consider it their divine right to corner the most lucrative jobs going. But how many people actually make it on merit? Do we not know that nepotism prevails even though it's not always described by its name. There's the discreet phone call. The letter of introduction. All that is needed for that little extra push that makes the crucial difference.

I totally support the media's stance against the sub-standard and the shoddy. But sub-standard by *whose* definition ?

I work with an organisation which supports tribals working for a better life for their own people. Our entire field team consists solely of tribals. A fact which stuns people. Most development organisations would have employed MSWs from well known social work institutions. We recruited on the premise that tribals know their people and their problems best. In a sense, it was reservation. Our team's level of thinking and analysis would put an MSW from Bombay or Calcutta to shame. Various acknowledged "experts" have admitted this. Yet, if these tribals had had to compete for a job as a social worker, they would initially have failed to impress. Because the criteria used to judge people in a job interview are based on elitism. They are western, urbanised, often, totally anglicised.

Take Air India, for example, where I did a stint as a stewardess some years ago. Few of my friends would admit to it, but most people got in because they knew someone who knew someone who could give you the little push which got you in. There were plump girls and skinny girls. Some were contact lenses, others needed braces. We were a passable bunch. Rarely exceptional. The criteria, so the job advertisement proclaimed, demanded a clear complexion, normal sight without glasses, even teeth (!), a specified height and proportionate weight. In every batch, there were a couple who passed all the tests. The others had relatives who made that all important phone call. Or, they knew someone who knew someone. There were those who were obviously all wrong for the job. But their "pull" was powerful.

Enter the scheduled tribe, scheduled caste batch. There were sniggers, exclamations of horror, overt and covert criticism. The SC/STs were generally not fluent in English. But if we talk to a French or Italian national, do we not regard their accents as quaint ? But the SC accent is *ghati*, low class. They probably needed an extra month of so called polishing. Because our criteria demands westernisation. Speak better English, we' retold.

Nevertheless, all of us needed to be taught a new language.

Food, wines, cheeses, cocktails. But our elitist training makes bull-shitting a fine art. So after a few months, everyone behaves as though they were born in a bath of Bordeaux or Burgundy—preferably with caviar in their mouths. The scheduled castes learnt the same lessons but teaching them was always a bigger bore than teaching us.

When it came to actual flying, there were many middle class, *memsahibs* who assumed the airs of the aristocracy and looked down their snooty noses at passenger. They'd been trained as air hostesses to serve, no doubt. Now they felt superior to their passengers. I know one cheerful, efficient tribal girl whose face is, anyday, a more welcome sight than the faces of the many middle class, shortsighted, long toothed, pimply, sour faced females who got in by virtue of a different kind of privilege.

You will argue that to serve tea and coffee does not need extraordinary merit. I concur. But there are many who argue that Air India hostesses are ambassadors of our country. Therefore, standards should be maintained. Which brings us back to WHOSE STANDARDS ?

The merit. I submit fully that doctors should *only* be recruited on the basis of merit. I agree that one should *not* give grace marks to admit people into medical college. But the candidates who get in on merit are a miniscule minority. The majority get in quite simply because their parents can afford capitation fees. This brings us to reservation for the rich. Most engineering and medical colleges admit students solely on payment of capitation fees. I am told the rate is around five lakhs per student for medicine and three lakhs for engineering. What price then merit ? And what standards can we expect here ? Or should we assume that anyone whose father can pay five lakhs must automatically be intelligent, necessarily of a superior standard. ? This however does not inspire editorials. Or are we talking here of a *double* standard ?

Our society is woven into a fabric, the strands of which are tightly knit. The binding factors are many. Nepotism, wealth, loyalties of class, caste, the old school tie. A few people are singled out for attention. The Doon coterie—everyone would

have liked to have a piece of the pie? The Devi Lals – brash, uncouth—“If I don’t help my relatives, whose relatives should I help?” With the others, there is the tacit understanding. Sophisticated. Understand. A conspiracy of silence exists. And the helping hands, the godfathers continue to flourish.

The question of standards can fill up a whole book. Whose standards and for whom? Someone in Bombay, by way of making conversation said to me. “Tribals, they must be weird people?” I replied, “I’m sure they’d return the compliment”. You take a villager, put him in your urban, westernised context and pronounce him weird, uncouth, uncultured – that famous dismissive Bombay phrase—a *ghati*. Your average Bombayite, urbanised, westernised (so he fancies), is a bit of a joke in a rural setting. Can he survive in a village without his environment, his urban crutches and comforts? Would he not feel weird?

The problem arises when everyone in the country is measured against the same yardstick and expected to produce the same results. Lets go back to doctors and merit. The average doctor is trained in a system of medicine which is urban and westernised. He graduates and in the majority of cases, he cannot cope with rural India which is where the majority of the country lives. A majority of people in the country die of diarrhoea, tuberculosis and other common diseases caused by malnutrition, poverty and hunger. Do we need doctors who conform to fancy “standards” or do we need or set our own need-based standards, *a la* barefoot doctors in third world countries?

When it comes to our institutions of excellence, the elitist schools which produce the ruling classes, have standards alright. But will they admit a five year old whose father is a sweeper or scavenger? Or is it pre-ordained that a lawyer’s daughter is naturally smarter, brighter and more intelligent than a sweeper’s child? Money and position buy privileges, buy the right education—the passport, to international success? Why then, does the media balk at SOME reservation only?

High Living, Plain Thinking

Mandalised Metropolitan Mind

ARVIND N. DAS

It is amazing how even as Mr. V.P. Singh sheds his pretence of value-based politics he is able to make large numbers in the urban elite recall principles and values. Gurus of statecraft who have spent years preaching the moral art of republican *realpolitik* suddenly wake up to deep societal concerns. They find themselves on the same side as those publicists who have no use for the hurly burly of democratic politics and would be happiest in an elite-dominated plutocratic paradise which might appear fascistic to some but which has the apparent advantage of being aseptic.

Analysts who have for long been propounding the importance of vote-banks and who have made caste calculations a fine art abruptly discover that they have all along felt caste to be evil. At the same time those free market wallahs who have abhorred Marxist class rather than analysis plead for taking class caste as the basic unit of class social transformation.

Historical Process

The one thing Mr. V.P. Singh's dalliance with the Mandal

Commission's recommendations has done successfully is to throw the pet theories of simple-minded socialists into disarray. The parsonian pedants who for decades have sworn by the validity of caste, ritual and kinship have been forced to assert that the intellectual wares that they peddled were spurious. Before Mandal was resurrected, the same sociologists and anthropologists who now wax eloquent on the merits of considering economic criteria laughed at the mention of class. They felt it was a concept which was misplaced in the Indian context and was imported by disgruntled and displaced Marxists wanted to disturb the harmonised co-existence of *Yajmani* groups performing different social roles evolved through an uniquely Indian historical process.

The same academic elite which is today proclaiming that there are only two valid categories into which Indians can be divided, i.e., the rich and the poor, was engaged not so long ago in the exercise of casting their finely meshed sociological nets into India's turbulent social waters and drawing out not class but the familiar fishes of "tribe", "sex" and above all caste.

The hypocrisy of academic sophistry is matched by the inconsistency of the political practice of the Indian elite. It affirms that its quest for the modern eldorado is premised on the outright rejection of the primordial social organisations like caste and that it seeks an order where the individual is the unit of society, economy and politics. It loudly inveighs against differentiation on the basis of social groups and reluctantly justifies its acceptance of positive discrimination in favour of Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SC-STs) only because it says those groups suffer from historical disabilities.

While it admits this exception to as self-proclaimed rule of individual as-unit, it opposes affirmative action by the state in favour of other backward castes (OBCs). It conveniently forgets however that while to day it expresses solicitous concern for SC-STs and aims its ire against the OBCs, only a few months ago when reservations for SCs and STs were extended through a constitutional amendment, its stormtroopers indulged in widespread rioting against those very SC-STs.

But the Indian elite can hardly help its hypocrisy. Used for centuries to deriving disproportionate advantages from a society ideologically subjugated by it, it has lost the self-confidence to stand by its own profession of promotion of merit. That indeed is the crux of the anti-Mandal imbroglio.

The Indian elite which constitutes less than a quarter of its population still has the possibility of filling more than half of all Central government and public sector jobs. In addition it has open to it the vast vistas of the private sectors. But such is its moral and intellectual degeneration that it feel insecure. It raises the bogey of merit being swamped by the multitude because it is not sure of its own competence.

Elite Domination

Indeed the lack of merit in the Indian elite is apparent to all except those who perversely avoid looking at the sordid state to which centuries of elite domination have reduced Indian society. UP to now neither have OBCs had reserved quotas nor have SC-STs been allowed to fill those set aside for them. And yet the state of affairs is such that Indian society is dangerously fragmented, its economy is nearly bankrupts and its polity is characterised by venality and inefficiency.

This is not without reason. The Indian elite has frozen its mind in time as it has lived by the self-serving social order ordained by Manu. Or, at best, it has moulded its thought according to hierarchical patterns imposed on it by elite-reinforcing ideas of colonial rule. While subaltern strands of Indian thought, whether of the *Bhakti* or *Sufi* tradition, rejected caste, the culturally alienated metropolitan elite, informed by colonial anthropology and Indology, saw idealised caste as the quintessential element of India.

The colonial regime did not only de-industrialise India ; it seriously de-intellectualised the elite too. And the de intellection reflected itself in rejection of the rich tradition of subaltern thought mechanistic adoption of social *idee fixe*. The humdrum secular existence of peasant and artisanal was ignored as the British forced Risely to conveniently reinforce Manu's ritual hierarchy. A fresh ordering of society on the basis of caste comfortably conformed to the limited mental frame of even the

Westernised Indian elite which was amused by its quaintness, intrigued by its complexity and, of course benefited from its ordained nature.

The simplification of social ideas was further vulgarised by the promotion of borrowed metropolitan values. The urge for high living eminently suited the plain thinking of the middle class mass. For years now we have heard about the growing ranks of the Indian affluent who are supposed to number much more a hundred million. The political-economic establishment has taken pride in doing its best to satisfy its import-oriented, consumerist urges. The state has been a prime player in this process. Even as it has allowed institutions of education and ideas to atrophy, it has encouraged mindless consumerism. While accumulation has been primitive, consumption tends to be ultra modern.

It has been possible to do this because the metropolitan elite, occasionally supported by its affluent country cousins, has maintained its stranglehold on institutions of governance. It is that control which today appears to be slipping. And, given the limited nature of resources, available the elite can continue to live in the style that it has got accustomed to only by maintaining an inordinate presence in the government. It is only in that manner that it can squeeze out the high rates of return on "investment" in government jobs by extraction of exorbitant "rent" through corruption and provide for its extravagance. The talk of "small government" and liberalisation is as unreal as the elite's commitment to "equality of status and of opportunity" enshrined in the Constitution.

Crocodile Tears

Implementation of the Mandal recommendations may be a mere ploy on the part of Mr V.P. Singh. He may not even be sincere about implementing it. But its very invocation has shown the Indian elite for what it is self-serving, selfish and disingenuous. The fact that today it feels called upon to talk of "economic criteria" and yet is not satisfied when those criteria are provided for, the fact that it sheds crocodile tears for, SC-STs while it continues to occupy seats reserved for them ; the fact that it feels insecure in the face of the growing rural

power of the OBCs and their consequent search for governmental avenues of faster accumulation, the fact that it uses merit as a euphemism for privilege all these demonstrate that the metropolitan mind which dominates elite behaviour is both devious and desperate.

At the time of independence, the Indian elite abolished caste by edict even as it continued to uphold its existence in academic analysis, political practice and day-to-day existence. Even then critical analysis like the Marxist Professor D.D. Kosambi pointed out that it was an empty Canutian command. Indeed it was worse, an attempt to pretend that caste had been abolished even as it was sought to be manipulated for petty political ends. Today the chickens of chicanery are coming home to roost.

Mandal: Changing Social Perception

N. VENUGOPALA RAO

The manner in which some of the self appointed watchdogs of our society have been whipping themselves into a frenzy over a perceived threat of social disintegration in the wake of the Mandal Commission report has been bizarre to say the least. Free-wheeling intellectuals, creative constitutionalists and classicist sociologists seen driven by the fear of a civilisational collapse while egging their wards on to the streets.

As they tire of their exertions and the street barricades recede from metropolitan to peripheral areas, it may be somewhat reassuring to remember that these things have happened before. There has always been an orchestration of protest whenever things begin to look up for the backward classes and those involved in these protests are predictably familiar.

It may be interesting to note that the Mandal Commission asked the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay, to study why earlier reservation schemes evoked such protest in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and why similar measures were generally accepted by the forward castes in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. It asked the Law Institute of India to study and analyse judicial pronouncements over the last 20 years on issues involving the

identification of the other backward classes and measures for their uplift.

The Tata Institute's findings suggest that where reservation schemes have had a long history, retaliation by the forward castes is likely to be absent. It also adds that "where the upper castes are suddenly faced with the prospect of losing their political and economic position...the chances of retaliation by them is very high".

Sense of Grievance

Critics have blasted the Mandal report for the enormous number of omissions and commissions. The report has been criticised for allegedly seeking to exploit the sense of grievance nursed by the backward classes to ride to power almost in perpetuity on the strength of the backward label. In an extension of this argument, Mr V.P. Singh is charged with seeking unchallenged Prime Ministership and all his plea that the government's mandate is to rectify the inequities in the prevailing social, economic and political order, are not likely to end the attacks.

Anticipating some of these attacks, the Law Institute of India's analysis of the issue says the other backward classes "are comparable to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the matter of their backwardness". The "juxtaposition" of the socially and educationally backward classes with the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in Article 15(4) of the Constitution, and the provision in Article 338(3) that the references to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were to be construed as including such backward classes as the President may specify on receipt of the report of a commission under Article 340(1) supports this position.

The other important points that the analysis makes are that the concept of the backward classes is not relative ..hence the division of the backwards into "backward and more backward" is unconstitutional.

It adds that backwardness must be both social and educational, and caste is a relevant factor in determining social backwardness but not the sole of dominant one. It also holds that

social backwardness is the offshoot of poverty and will be aggravated by caste considerations. From this, it is apparent that the report did seek to clarify backwards on the basis of "objective tests" and an "empirical approach."

One critic ridicules the report for its assumptions that social and educational backwardness is a result of the Hindu caste system. But no notice is taken of the qualification that follows that while its assumptions may reflect the "traditional view of the caste system based on Hindu shastras", the changes triggered by the introduction of adult franchise after independence may have weakened certain "caste taboos."

Different Criteria

What has also been ignored is the application of 11 different criteria evolved by the commission to determine social and educational backwardness, including four specifically economic criteria. The latter seek to identify classes/castes where the average value of family assets is at least 25 per cent below the state average, where the number of families living in *kuccha* houses is at least 25 per cent above the state average ; where drinking water sources are beyond half a kilometre for more than 50 per cent of the households and where 25 per cent of families above the state average have taken consumption loans.

The late Mr Karve, a professor of social anthropology at Deccan College, Pune, says, "Today, the majority of posts in higher paid government service are held by the Brahmins, Kayasthas and a few other castes. Political power is also wielded by them. The handicapped castes must first be brought on a par with the advanced castes as regards educational opportunities before one can talk of breaking the caste system."

Social Justice

The Mandal Commission says : "Equality before the law, enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution is the most precious right of an Indian citizen. "It goes on to say that it is a "well known dictum of social justice that there is equality only among equals. To treat unequals as equals is to perpetuate inequality."

This is the central truth that the battalions ranged against the Mandal report refuse to acknowledge because of the damage it will cause to the credibility of their social concerns. They talk of percentages of reservations and gradations and backwardness, and raise other sophisticated objections to obscure their alarm at the prospect of losing age-old privileges. Much clearly depends, in the words of Mandal report, on the "changes in the perception of the problems of the other backward classes by the ruling classes", who must also remember that the "battle against social backwardness has to be fought in the minds of the backward people."

Courtesy : *Times of India*

Passing the buck

Colin Gonsalves protests against the hasty intervention of the Supreme Court on the Mandal controversy which, he claims is a political and not a legal issue

COLIN GONSALVES

The Supreme Court has now confirmed it expects to hear all the petitions challenging the Mandal Commission report before the end of this year. The court's intervention in this matter began with the issuing of directions to the effect that no High Court should entertain any petition and all such matters pending should be transferred to the Supreme Court. After the agitation against the implementation of the Mandal Commission's report took a turn for the worse, particularly in New Delhi, the court has come to the conclusion that intervention is necessary. Nothing can be more disastrous for the nation.

First of all the undue interest and haste shown by the court is unwarranted. Public interests litigants have time and again complained that the court drags its feet on social issues of importance while speeding up proceedings when it comes to cases relating to the rich and powerful. Thapar in Delhi obtained bail at midnight and the Reliance petitions were taken up out of turn for super-expedited hearing and, in Bombay, the High Court gave priority to Nusli Wadia's deportation case.

But the cases of the poor lie neglected though they cover legal and social issues of much significance.

The Bhopal case was one of the most important public interest cases ever to be taken up by the Supreme Court. Several lawyers put in years of work pro bono. Social work organisations put in thousands of hours of work and spent huge sums of money on meticulously documented evidence. It was therefore expected that, at the very least, the court would do its bit and handle the case effectively and immediately. But this was not to be. The lamentable performance of the Supreme Court has been extensively commented upon and it is not necessary to repeat the criticism here.

The haste with which the Supreme Court has intervened in the reservation issue is, perhaps, another example of how the court places upper class litigants above the issues relating to the poor. Intervention on the Mandal Commission report has, as expected, resulted in its implementation of the report being stayed.

The role of the press, political parties and even the government in egging the Supreme Court on to intervene and stay the report marks a black period in the history of our nation. All the major newspapers have attacked the report, often without caring to even get the facts right. The *Indian Express* carried out a campaign that gravely distorted basic facts relating to the report. It was falsely stated, for example, the recommendations of the report were based only on caste considerations whereas, in fact, the social and economic bases of the report are substantial.

The over-and-above basis and the carry forward rule for reservation was attacked as a newly introduced irrationality, glossing over the fact that they were well established practices that have been upheld by the Supreme Court in Thomas' case and the decisions.

Very few journalists cared to point out that the government had decided not to implement the Mandal report for posts in science and technology, space, atomic energy and the armed forces. It was not to apply for promotions. It was not to be thrust on the states. *Most important it was not to apply for education.*

Thus it is ironic that students should take to the streets, because they are not affected by the implementation of the Mandal reports at all. The reservation proposed is only for direct recruitment to the central services, public sector undertakings and nationalised banks. Had the press played a fair role and educated its readers as to the actual effect of the report, the students may not have agitated in the first place.

The role of the political parties is dubious and unprincipled to say the least. Double-think and double-speak seem to be the norm. This is because all parties have a sizeable section of OBCs who stand to benefit from reservation. Political parties are, therefore, playing a Jekyll-and-Hyde role by pretending to support the report before their OBC constituents while opposing it elsewhere. Overall political party opposition as such has been lukewarm.

If this is so, why did the Supreme Court intervene? If almost all political parties have, at some stage or the other, officially supported the report, what compelling circumstances justify interference by the court ?

Let there be no mistake ; *this issue is political and not legal*. The Supreme Court must be recognised as a politico-legal institution ; political first, then legal. It is not correct to say the court has no jurisdiction to dabble in political matters, as some Constitutional experts argue. But should the court intervene, it must then be understood that its pronouncements are political. *Let it not hide behind a facade of legal complications*.

Most of the Constitutional points have already been decided upon. In keeping with Balaji's case reservation has been kept to within 50 per cent. The economic, social and educational criteria have been incorporated. Extensive surveys and fact collection have been completed. The legal opinion of the Indian Law Institute has been taken.

The court has already held that simply because the list of OBCs includes some who should not be there or excludes some who ought to be included is no ground for striking down the entire list. The Mandal Commission has been meticulous in legal detail as well as facts. Even the criticism that somewhat dated figures have been used cannot be substantiated as it is no one's case that the situation has changed with time.

Most distressing is the fact that the government itself encouraged the apex court to interfere and stay the reservations proposed, thereby taking the credit for introducing and defending the report on the one hand, while blaming the court for the stay order on the other.

In this cat-and-mouse game it is the backward classes which will suffer, discrimination exploited and increased by a game of electoral politics.

Job Reservation Policy

A.Y. DARSHANKAR

The anti-reservation agitation is not new to the Indian political system. Political parties have tried to find excuse to start agitation and also found excuse to end the agitation, convincing the concerned by one way or the other. New National Front Government at the centre passed the reservation bill, extending the period of reservation for ten years in December 1989. Many students misunderstood it as the extension of reservation facilities in employment. The flames of the anti-reservation stir first broke in Uttar Pradesh and took barely a couple of days to reach Bihar. On December 15, students of various colleges in Patna boycotted classes and put road-blocks for many hours at several places in the state capital. Soon, the anti-reservationists broadened their movement by demanding the scrapping of the system of reservations altogether. It took Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra six days to explain that what was being extended was political reservation and not educational and employment reservation.¹ Prior to this, anti-reservation agitation has taken place in Gujrat². Leaders of Maratha Maha Sangh in Maharashtra have also

expressed their displeasure on the reservation policy based on caste. All this has led the intellectuals of this country to re-examine the policy of job reservation in the country.

Indian Society

Indian society has been described as a "compartmental" society ; within it a vast number of groups maintain distinct and diverse styles of life. The system by which these groups are related and mutually accommodated is very complex. One of the distinctive and pervasive features of Indian society is the division into castes. At the bottom of the caste hierarchies are found the "untouchables"—castes with the lowest ritual standing and usually the lowest economic position and traditionally subject to onerous social and civil disabilities.³

In different parts of the country "untouchables" have been identified differently. In some parts they are called "unclean sudras", in other parts they are regarded referred to as as outside the four varnas. They are also "outcastes". Foreign observers think that they are not members of the caste. But this is wrong, because they are members of the castes—those which have the lowest ritual standing and often the most depressed economic condition. Generally, they are also lowest in income, health, education and cultural resources. In the 1971 census those officially classed as untouchables (Scheduled Castes) by the government constituted nearly 80 million, or about 14.6% of India's total population of 548 million (or over 17% of India's 453 million Hindus).⁴

The position of untouchables in British India was humiliating. They were subject to more extensive and severe disabilities. They were denied access to public facilities, such as wells, schools, roads, post-offices, courts and temples. In short, inhuman treatment was given to them.

Social reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi were pleading for social equality to untouchables. After independence constitutional measures were taken to bring them into the mainstream of the country. Article 46 of the of the Directive Principle of State Policy declares that the state

shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker section of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Article 16(4) of the Constitution empowered the state to provide for reservation in appointments for backward class of citizens, who have not been adequately represented in the services under the state. Constitution also said that nothing shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizen or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

The benefits of reservation are extended to a wide group of population. There are three major classes. First, there are those castes, which were designated as Scheduled Castes (SC) on the basis of their "untouchability". They numbered nearly 80 million (14.6% of the population) according to 1971 census. Second, there are the Scheduled Tribes (ST), who are distinguished by their tribal culture and physical isolation and many of whom are resident of specially protected Scheduled Area. They numbered more than 38 million (6.9% of the population) in 1971. Third, there are Backward classes (OBC), a heterogeneous category composed of many castes and low in the traditional social hierarchy. It was estimated that they were approximately 60 million in 1961.

To establish equality and social justice in the society, three types of reservation were pleaded. They are (a) reservation of seats in the state and central legislatures, (b) reservation of seats in educational/institutions and (c) reservation of seats in the government employment. This paper is confined to the job reservation policy only.

Why Reservation ?

Dr. Ambedkar favoured the policy of reservation of post in civil service. According to him, public service in the country had become by reason of various circumstances a close preserve for the Brahmins and allied castes. The Non-Brahmins, the depressed classes and the Mohamadans are virtually

excluded from them. Reacting to the views that public posts should be filled by efficient administrators on the basis of educational merit, proved in the competitive examination, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar expressed that the attitude of the Brahmin and allied castes had no doubt the appearance of fairness. The system of competitive examination relied upon might result in fairness to all castes and creeds under a given set of circumstances. But those circumstances pre-suppose that the educational system of the state is sufficiently democratic and is such that facilities for education are sufficiently widespread and sufficiently used to permit all classes from which good public servants are likely to be forthcoming to compete. Otherwise even with the system of open competition large classes are sure to be left out in the cold.⁵

Employment in central government or in the state governments provides a degree of security, prestige and authority not obtainable elsewhere. For a broad section of Indian population government employment is the prime focus of ambition. The presence of its members in administration had been regarded by many groups in India as an assurance of accessibility and sympathetic response to their interest and warrant of fair dealing on the part of the government. "Having men belonging to their own fold at different levels gives the people a sense of confidence that they will get a fair deal, they will be treated with consideration and no officer will scorn them as people of no consequence"⁶ Dr. Ambedkar thought that public services should have representative character and it should not become the monopoly of any single caste. According to him, officers who are drawn from a particular caste and in whose mind consciousness of caste sits closer than conscious regard for public duty may easily prostitute their offices to the aggrandizement of their community and to the detriment of the general public. Instances of favouritism, particularly on the grounds of caste and creed, are of common occurrence, though they are always excused on some other plausible ground. Thus, from the outset "untouchable" leaders have seen in government employment not only career opportunities, but relief from unsympathetic and oppressive administration facilitation of

the utilisation of opportunities and readier implementation of programmes for their benefit.⁷

Canvas of Reservation

For the first time SC people got reservation in central government employment in 1943. ST people availed of this opportunity in 1950. Since 1947, 12.5% for SC and 5% for ST candidates were reserved in the all India competitive examination. These percentages were raised to 15% and 7.5% respectively in 1970. The central government has not at any time provided any reservation in government employment for other backward classes. But state government have provided reservations to NT, DNT and OBC people alongwith SC and ST. The percentage of reservation differs from state to state.

Reservations are accompanied by an array of other special provisions designed to enhance the ability of the preferred groups to compete successfully for government posts. These include age concession, relaxation of the maximum age for entry in to the service, fee-concession, reduction of the minimum qualifying marks on examination and waiver of a passing mark on viv-voce examination and specific safeguards against retraining. Some Universities in Maharashtra prepare SC and ST candidates for IAS Examination through IAS pre-coaching centres. All expenditure of this training centre is borne by government of India.

TABLE 1

Appointments of SC & ST from 1953 to 1975

	SC (1953)		SC (1975)		ST (1953)		ST (1975)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Class I Higher administrative	20	0.35	1201	3.4	6	0.10	218	0.6
Class II Lower administrative.	113	1.29	2695	5.0	21	0.24	322	0.6
Class III Clerical	2489	43.2	17419	10.7	2548	0.47	36893	2.3
Class IV menial.	161958	20.52	23084	1.86	14512	1.80	49464	4.0

Achievements

If one examines the achievements of job reservations in government services, one will find it far from satisfactory. In the last 40 years their inclusion in the government services is not encouraging. Following tables are self-explanatory.

If we examine the above Table 1, we will find that more appointments were made during the period 1953 to 1975 but, if we examine their percentage we will conclude that their representation in public service is not satisfactory. The conditions of the Scheduled Tribe people is worst than SC people.

TABLE 2

Comparison of SC & ST employment in Government service and public sectors, 1975.

Class	<i>Scheduled Caste</i>		<i>Scheduled Tribe</i>	
	Govt. service	Public sector.	Govt. service	Public sector.
I	3.4%	1.4%	0.6%	0.3%
II	5.0%	3.0%	0.6%	0.4%
III	10.7%	13.7%	2.3%	6.0%
IV	18.6%	26.2%	4.0%	11.9%

TABLE 3

Reservation of post in different categories

Year	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV
1965	1.64	2.82	8.88	17.75
1970	2.36	3.84	9.27	18.09
1975	3.43	4.94	10.71	18.64
1979	4.75	7.37	12.55	19.32
1980	4.83	8.07	11.54	19.16
1981	4.62	6.06	12.68	33.38

If we examine the Table 2 we find that the representation of SC and ST people is very low in public sector undertaking. The Class I post, which is regarded a very important post of decision-making is filled by very few people. More posts of SC & ST caste are given to Class III and Class IV posts. The position of ST in public undertaking is again worst, like government services.

If we examine the above table we will find out that SC & ST people were given more jobs in the Class IV service only. But other classes of services remained unfilled. Does this attitude of appointing authorities mean that SC and ST candidates are not suitable for Class I service ? This attitude of appointing authorities have to be changed.

Policy of reservation in practice

If we examine the implementation part of reservation of seats in government jobs, one can find that it is not satisfactory. There are sufficient reasons for the same. The Government of India also realised that the policy of reservation was not implemented properly by the high caste officers. Therefore, a special drive for the recruitment of SC and ST candidates was announced and partially put into practice. Low profile of recruitment of SC and ST candidates is due to following reasons :

- (1) It has been seen that a large number of positions are effectively kept outside the scope of reservation under one or the other pretext ;
- (2) There are some departments which are not covered purposely ;
- (3) Many of the posts are filled by promotion and negligible percentage is covered by reservation ;
- (4) Whenever a new office is created, the posts are not filled by reservation under the pretext of competence ;
- (5) Generally it is the practice that temporary posts are not filled by reservation to avoid future complications ;
- (6) Some time posts are not filled by giving remarks

that qualified candidates were not available among SC & ST.

- (7) Many a times such posts are reserved, which the authorities do not want to fill, knowing well that SC & ST candidates will not be available for such posts.

Conclusion

National Front Government has promised the people that they will implement the report of the Mandal Commission, in which reservation is provided to the large section of the society. From the last experience of reservation, we have seen that political will to implement the policy was absent among the politicians. The political will have to be prepared in the country to mobilise the High Hindu Castes to liberalise their conservative views. The SC & ST community will have to be told frankly that reservation is not a permanent solution for their development. They will have to be mobilised to think for other alternatives than the reservation of jobs, after a particular period.

It has also been seen that a particular caste only has got more advantages due to reservation policy leaving other caste people. It is necessary to mobilise those SC/ST caste people and cautious steps should have to be taken to give them jobs in Government service. Government will have to think about those SC/ST people, who are are not educated and therefore does not fit in reservation. Resources will have to be raised to uplift them even by adopting new labour welfare programmes. In short, antagonist high caste people and staunch believers in job reservations have to be convinced about the necessity of change in their attitudes.

NOTES

1. Indu Bhatri, *Politics of Anti-Reservation stir in Bihar. Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, Feb. 10, 1990, pp. 309-10.
2. Ghanshyam Shah, *Middle Class Politics ; Case of Anti-Reservation Agitation in Gujrat. Economic and Political Weekly*, annual number 1987, pp. 158-165.
3. Marc galanter, *competing Equalities*, OUP, Delhi, 1984, pp 7-13.
4. Ibid, p. 14.

5. *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches*, Vol. II, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1982, p. 395.
6. *Tamilnadu Backward Class Commission*, 1971, I, p. 84.
7. M.C. Rajah, R. Srinivasan at Indian Central Committee, 1929, as quoted by Marc Galanter, *OP. Cit.*, p. 85.

Courtesy : *Radical Humanist*.

In Defence of Mandal

NAVAL KISHORE YADAV

Prof. Dharma Kumar (Mandal commission threatens disaster, August 9) has proved that she too is conditioned by the Brahminical system that for millenia has used religious scriptures, injunctions, propaganda and plain force to impose a form of apartheid on India more astutely than South Africa ever has.

As long as the supposedly meritorious Dwija ruled the country, it was plundered and subjugated repeatedly by foreign invaders. They came, they saw, they conquered. This happened because Indian society had been split into thousands of castes by the Manu Smriti. The overwhelming majority of these castes were so exploited and oppressed that they could not develop any sense of nationalism during a crisis, and so foreign invaders faced little resistance. This has been documented by Habib and Nizami in theory of urban revolution.

Ram pant Corruption

We need to ask why the other backward castes (OBCs), accounting for 52 per cent of the population, have not been able to produce even a single Supreme Court judge after 43 years of independence. We need to ask why Brahmins, accounting for less than five per cent of the population, hog

around 50 per cent of all executive posts. Whatever the underlying theory of merit in this system, it is in practice a form of oppression where those fortunate enough to be born in one section of society lord it over others less fortunate. There is talk of modernising society by abolishing reservations. But can any modern society justify a situation where, in the name of merit, a tiny percentage of the population can cast the black shadow of Manu on the struggling majority ?

Rampant corruption and nepotism have crippled every law and procedure in India. This is readily admitted even by the upper castes. When then does the question of merit arise ? In practice, the beneficiaries of the supposedly merit-driven system are the kith and kin of those already in office, or those with enough money to buy favours and positions. The overwhelming majority of these beneficiaries belong to the upper castes.

Social Subjugation

The Mandal commission report was submitted to the government in December 1980. The Congress sat on it and did nothing because most of its top leaders belonged to the upper castes. They apprehended that if the Mandal commission's recommendations were implemented, this would break the upper-caste stranglehold on government jobs. This in turn would, they feared, break the nexus between politicians and bureaucrats of the upper castes which has been a notable feature of Congress rule in Bihar and elsewhere.

The majority of Janata Dal MPs and MLAs hail from the middle and lower castes and classes. So it was quite apparent from the start that the new Janata leaders at the Centre and states would do something concrete to help the backward classes and reverse thousands of years of social subjugation. This has now taken the form of accepting the Mandal commission recommendations, and reserving 27 per cent of jobs in government service and the public sector for OBCs. This will produce social results which were economic development cannot.

In spite of considerable economic development during the British Raj and in the post-independence era, caste notions sanctioned by the scriptures still dominate social relations.

The OBCs still suffer from widespread poverty and an inferiority complex. This, buttressed by nepotism and corruption on the part of the upper caste oligarchy, has come in the way of social mobility and kept down those struggling at the bottom of the social ladder.

The basic aim of reservations is not just to give jobs. Obviously such a provision can never provide employment to all those eligible for the reserved quota. But it will help create an elite among OBCs that will be on par with the upper-caste elite. The OBC elite will provide role models for others of their communities, and inspire the latter to carve out a bigger role for themselves in the socio-economic life of our country. The hold of casteism on society is so strong today that if an upper-caste candidate from a particular village makes it to the IAS, this does not enthuse OBCs in the village. On the contrary, they see it as yet another instance of the forward castes maintaining their stranglehold on the levers of the power structure. This is one reason why so few OBCs aspire to greater things, and why they (cannot get even a tiny fraction of UPSC appointments despite constituting 52 per cent of the population.

Nefarious Alliance

The implementation of the Mandal commission recommendations will not only act as a stimulant for OBC candidates, it will also bring greater heterogeneity to the administration all over India. Such a heterogeneous structure will help check the nefarious alliance between crooked politicians and law-enforcement agencies that is evident today. In regimes dominated by upper castes, this alliance has led to the sabotage of development schemes intended to help the masses. This has been documented by Prof. Pradhan Prasad, Harry W. Blair and others in economic journals. The development of a heterogeneous civil service will snap caste-based alliances, and make people in all walks of life more fearful of the law. That will reduce corruption, nepotism and inefficiency.

This is not just a theoretical proposition. Some states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have long adopted a job reservation policy for OBCs, and they are more advanced and civilised

today. An extension of their culture to the whole of India will finally exercise the ghost of Manu and create a more equal society. Job reservations will enhance the overall status of OBCs and thus end notions of caste superiority based on supposed purity and impurity. Prof. Rajni Kothari has said in a recent article (National Herald, December 1989), if you want to bring casteism to an end, provide more reservations for the backwards.

Courtesy : *Times of India*

Reservation for OBCs : Hardly An Abrupt Decision

KAMESHWAR CHOUDHARY

The policy of reservation may be a 'reform measure' adopted by the ruling class to maintain the existing inegalitarian system, but opposing it at the moment would be a retrograde step.

The decision of the central government to introduce 27 per cent reservation for the socially and educationally backward classes (also called other backward classes) in the central government services and public sector undertakings as per the recommendations of the Backward Classes Commission (1980) headed by B.P. Mandal has spurred vehement criticisms and agitations in different parts of the country.

It is argued that this measure has been taken in haste, that it is an abrupt decision. But this is not the case. In fact, this argument only shows the myopic vision of the critics. The Constitution of India made a special provision of making reservation for socially and educationally backward classes (SEBCs) about 40 years back in 1950. This provision was made in the section on the 'fundamental rights' of the citizens and not under the 'directive principles' of state policy. Hence, the state had to act immediately and not delay this step for

long. As a consequence the first Backward Classes Commission was appointed in 1953 under the chairmanship of Kakasaheb Kalelkar. The commission submitted its report in 1955. According to its recommendations, in all government and local body services the reservation for SEBCs was to be 25 per cent in Class I, $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent in Class II and 40 per cent in Class III and IV services (p 205). But the recommendations remained unimplemented. When the Janata Party came to power the second commission on the SEBCs was appointed under the chairmanship of B.P. Mandal. This commission submitted its report in 1980 and made several recommendations including 27 per cent reservation of jobs for the SEBCs in the central government services and public sector undertakings. Again the Congress government at the centre did not implement the recommendations. However, in the last Lok Sabha elections in 1989 the National Front made a commitment to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. As a result, only recently the National Front government at the centre took a decision to implement the same.

Hence, making reservation for SEBCs is not an abrupt decision. It was long overdue as a constitutional obligation. It does not matter much as to what impact the exit of Devi Lal had on this issue. It could have been delayed only by months and years and not by decades. The MPs and MLAs belonging to the OBCs constitute a sizeable section of the legislators. They wanted to implement this measure. So, it had to be done. Thus, it is good that an important constitutional goal has been achieved in the direction of promoting social justice.

Caste Basis

The Mandal Commission is criticised on the ground that it has recommended reservation to be made on the basis of caste which is a communal criterion whereas a secular one would have been preferable in a democratic and secular country like India. It is true that caste has been adopted as one of the criteria by the commission but it is not the sole criterion for identifying the SEBCs for which the provision of reservation is made in the constitution. In fact, the commission adopted a 'multiple approach' for the identification of the

SEBCs/OBCSs (that is other than SCs and STs) for the purpose of reservation. The main sources used by the commission for preparation of the list of the OBCs are :

- (i) Socio-educational field survey ;
- (ii) Census Report of 1961 (for the identification of backward tribes) ;
- (iii) Personal knowledge gained through extensive touring of the country and receipt of voluminous public evidences from members of the general public, voluntary organisations, social workers, politicians, legislators, etc, and
- (iv) List of OBCs notified by various state governments (p. 54).

Moreover, the commission applied some other tests like stigma of low occupation, criminality, nomadism, beggary, untouchability and inadequate representation in public services.

In the socio-educational field survey, the indicators for determining social and educational backwardness are grouped under three heads in part first of the report, i.e., social educational and economic :

(A) Social ($4 \times 3 = 12$ points)

- (i) Castes/Classes considered as socially backward by others.
- (ii) Castes/Classes which mainly depend on manual labour for their livelihood.
- (iii) Castes/Classes where at least 25 per cent females and 10 per cent males above the state average get married at an age below 17 years in rural areas and at least 10 per cent females and 5 per cent males do so in urban area.
- (iv) Castes/Classes where participation of females in work is at least 2 per cent above the state average.

(B) Educational ($3 \times 2 = 6$ points)

- (v) Castes/Classes where the number of children in the age-group of 5-15 years who never attended school is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (vi) Castes/Classes where the rate of student drop-out in the age-group of 5-15 years is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (vii) Castes/Classes amongst whom the proportion of matri-

culates is least 25 per cent below the state average.

(C) Economic ($4 \times 1 = 4$ points)

- (viii) Castes/Classes where the average value of family assets is at least 25 per cent below the state average.
- (ix) Castes/Classes where the number of families living in kuccha houses is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (x) Castes/Classes where the source of drinking water is beyond half a kilometre for more than 50 cent of households.
- (xi) Castes/Classes where the number of households having taken consumption loan is at least 25 per cent above the state average (p 52).

Here, separate weightage was given to indicators of each group because these groups were considered to be not of equal importance in identifying "socially and educationally backward classes". All the social indicators were given a weightage of three points each, educational indicators a weightage of two points each and economic indicators a weightage of one point each. Moreover, only those castes/classes which had a score of 50 per cent (i.e., 11 points out of 22 in all) or above were listed as socially and educationally backward and the rest were treated as 'advanced'.

Hence, not only social but educational and economic criteria were also included for the purpose of identifying OBCs in the socio-educational field survey. Moreover, position in the caste hierarchy was given only three points out of 12 points in the social criteria and 22 points in all. Considerations such as dependence on manual labour, age at marriage, female participation in work, children's attendance at school, drop-out rate at school level, proportion of matriculates, value of family assets, residence in kuccha houses, access to the source of drinking water and amount of consumption loan cannot be said to casteist by any stretch of imagination. If socially, economically and-educationally backward people also belong to the lower castes, this is not their fault. This is a consequence of their age-old deprivation, oppression and exploitation by the privileged castes/classes in the Indian society.

Further the commission holds that the method of socio-educational field survey was 'objective' because the point system did not allow any subjective assessment. This method was found to be "highly dependable in practice" because as a result of its application most of the well known socially and educationally backward castes were identified as backward (p. 53).

However, in some, cases, the findings based on socio-educational field survey happened to be inconsistent with the living social reality. For example, the social status of Kasera caste in Bihar, Dhobi in Gujarat, Agasa in Karnataka, Kumbhar in Rajasthan, Badager in Tamil Nadu, etc, is known to be very low. Yet these castes scored below 11 points and, thus, qualified for ranking as forward. To rectify such aberration, it was necessary to have the "intimate personal knowledge of local conditions and the use of massive public evidence" to which the commission took recourse. The result of the field survey was "carefully scrutinised and such aberrations rectified as far as possible" (p 55).

Further, for identifying OBCs in the central government services the commission used two criteria for both Hindu and non-Hindu communities. In respect of employees belonging to the Hindu communities, the following criteria were adopted : (i) an employee was deemed to be socially backward "if he does not belong to any of the three twice born (Dvij) 'varnas' i.e., he is neither a Brahmin, nor a Kshatriya nor a Vaishya", and (ii) he was deemed to be educationally backward "if neither his father nor his grandfather had studied beyond the primary level". As regard the non-Hindu communities (i) an employee was deemed to be socially backward "if either (1) he is a convert from those Hindu communities which have been defined as socially backward as in case of the Hindu communities above, or (2) in case he is not such a convert, his parental income is below the poverty line, i.e., Rs. 71 per head month", (ii) he was deemed to be educationally backward "if neither his father nor his grandfather had studied beyond the primary level" (Appendix VII, p 91). Here, it must be noted that an employee is qualified for membership of OBCs only if, both socially and educationally he was found to be backward according to the

above criteria. Educational backwardness was given equal importance to position in the varnacaste hierarchy.

Hence, the criticism that the Mandal Commission has recommended reservation only on the basis of caste is not justified. In fact, it adopted a "multiple approach" for the identification of OBCs for the purpose of reservation. It took into consideration various criteria i.e., noncaste social criteria as well as educational and economic while placing castes/classes in the category of OBCs. Caste criterion has been given only a meagre importance in the whole scheme.

Economic Criteria

The critics of the Mandal Commission have advocated the adoption of economic criteria at two levels. One stream of the critics opine that reservation should be made only on the basis of economic backwardness irrespective of social and educational backwardness. But this view is not in consonance with the provisions of the constitution. While imposing prohibition on discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth Article 15), Article 15(4) declares that nothing shall prevent the state from making "special provision for the advancement of any *socially and educationally backward classes* of citizens" (emphasis mine). Moreover, Article 16(4) of the constitution specifically empowers the state to make "any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the state, is *not adequately represented in the services under the state*" (emphasis mine). In addition, Article 340 of the constitution authorises the president of India to "appoint a commission...to investigate the conditions of *socially and educationally backward classes* and the difficulties under which they labour and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the union or any state to remove such difficulties and to improve their conditions..." (emphasis mine). Hence, it is very clear that the constitution provides for giving preferential treatment through special measures such as reservation in jobs by the state only on the basis of 'social and educational backwardness'. The advocacy of reservation solely on the basis of economic criteria does not have constitutional sanction.

Another stream of opinion supports reservation for OBCs in principle but suggests that economic criteria should be applied within that category so that the well-off section amongst OBCs does not corner the benefits. This concern is genuine but understanding of the problem seems to be inadequate. In fact, application of economic criteria within OBCs for reservation will largely negate the provision of reservation and amount to opposing this measure in practice. Here, let us have a look at the figures regarding representation of OBCs, SCs and STs in central government services.

From Tables 1 to 3 we find that though the proportion of the OBCs (including both Hindu and non-Hindu castes and communities) is 52 per cent of the total population, their representation in central government services is 4.69 per cent in Class I, 10.63 per cent in Class II and 24.40 per cent in Class III and IV. Their proportion is even lower than the SCs and STs who constitute 22.5 per cent of the population but whose representation is 5.68 per cent in Class I, 18.81 per cent in Class II and 24.40 per cent in Class III in and IV. Whereas overall employment of SCs and STs in central government services is 18.71 per cent, it is merely 12.55 per cent for OBCs. Moreover, representation of OBCs in some of the ministries, departments and public sector undertakings has been found to be nil in Class I and II services (1980 Report, pp. 93, 95). In contrast, the forward castes and communities who constitute about 25 per cent of the total population have monopolised about 90 per cent of Class I, 70 per cent of Class II and 50 per cent of Class III and IV jobs under the central government.

Further, it is suggested that economic criteria should be applied within the OBCs so that the benefits of reservation are not skimmed off by the well-off section of this category and the really backward section left out. However, if the economically well off and therefore educationally advanced section of the OBCs is excluded, only the poor and ill-educated, underqualified or uneducated section would remain to take advantage of the provisions of reservation which they, in practice, cannot take because of their educational backwardness. As a result, jobs reserved for the OBCs shall largely lie unfilled. The unfilled seats shall be dereserved after three years, as

TABLE I
Representation of OBCs, SCs and STs in central
Government Services

<i>Category of Employees</i>	<i>Total Number of Employees</i>	<i>Per Cent of SC/ST</i>	<i>Per Cent of OBCs</i>
Class I	1,74,043	05·68	04·69
Class II	9,12,786	18·81	10·63
Class III and IV	4,84,646	24·40	24·40
All Classes	15,71,475	18·71	12·55

Source. Report of the Backward Classes Commission
(1980), First Part, p 42.

recommended by the Mandal Commission and consequently grabbed by the candidates belonging to the forward castes/classes. The net result would be a perpetuation of the overwhelming sway of the upper castes/classes over the services for a long time to come. Moreover, there will be less competition amongst the OBC candidates and relatively ill-educated and ill-equipped candidates will get into services. The criterion of merit which is so dear to the critics will be put at an unmanageable discount and efficiency of the administration severely eroded.

In addition, the advocates of the application of economic criteria within the OBCs must stand for adoption of a similar yardstick in case of the SCs and STs. Otherwise they are to be blamed for pursuing a double standard. It is well known that as a result of the policy of reservation for the SC/STs an elite section has emerged amongst them. This elite section is economically well-off and educationally advanced and therefore grabbing all the benefits of reservation. The most backward section of the SCs/STs is left high and dry. Hence, we can think of applying economic criteria within the SCs/STs as well. But adoption of economic criteria for exclusion of relatively advanced section of the OBCs and SCs/STs is not desirable at the present stage of their progress.

Because, in practice, it will nullify the whole provision of reservation for them as a result of a large number of seats reserved for them remaining vacant. This is borne out by the fact that even now, when the economically well off section of SCs/STs is not excluded a large number of jobs reserved for them remain unfilled in Class I and Class II services. The Mandal Commission found that the proportion of the SCs/STs in Class I and Class II stood at 5.68 per cent and 18.81 per cent respectively despite extending an unqualified reservation to them. Hence, there is no need of making any qualified reservation for the OBCs as in the case of the SCs/STs.

Caste War

The critics of the policy of reservation have time and again raised the bogey of heart burning to those moritorious candidates who entry into services would be barred. They argue that this heart burning leads to division of hearts, social tensions and caste wars. This argument has been noted by the Mandal Commission. The commission holds that this reasoning is based on 'partisan approach'. Here, the real motive of the ruling elite is to preserve its privileges (p. 57).

After all, it is only the students and people belonging to the upper castes who are involved in anti-reservation stir. Their real intent in their concern for preference to merit and efficiency of administration is to perpetuate their traditional sway especially in the higher echelons of the administration. In fact, they cannot be expected to give up their privileged position without a fight.

We know that certain measures of the state, whether in economy, politics or administration are meant for sectional interests. In such cases we have to take sides and behave in a partisan manner. However, it is open to individual or group choice to take side of the poor or the rich, the privileged or the underprivileged and forward castes/classes or backward castes/classes. As regards the Mandal Commission it is SEBCs who are going to benefit and forward castes and communities to lose their dominance over administration. Here, the supremacy of the forward castes and communities is aimed to be challenged and undermined. Hence, the critics call the Mandal

Commission casteist. Had there been no challenge to the dominance of forward castes/classes, they would not have talked of division of heart and created social tensions or caste wars. As early as 1980, the Mandal Commission commented that the chorus of alarm being raised against reservation for OBCs on the plea that this causes heart burning was "sheer sophistry". It also observed that "the furore reservation is not aimed at the principle itself, but against the new class of beneficiaries, as they are now clamouring for a share of the opportunities which were all along monopolised by the higher castes" (p 58).

It is also argued that reservation will not remove the dividing lines of caste but institutionalise them by further codifying existing caste divisions and thus causing a 'civilisational havoc' to the country. In fact, it does not matter much if castes are documented when it is made hereditary and norms and values associated with that system are actually practised in real life. The caste system has operated as a well established social institution in India since ages and the lower caste people have suffered a lot under this unjust system. Whoever has a historical understanding cannot blame the Mandal Commission (1980) for codifying and institutionalising caste. It had been with us and it is still with us though the degree of its rigidity and severity has got reduced to some extent. The most essential features of caste are still almost unaffected such as norms regarding marriage, dining and priesthood. Hence, if some special provision is made for upliftment of backward classes of the population, caste has to be taken as one of the criteria of social backwardness. This is recognition of a historical fact and that is exactly what the Mandal Commission has done.

The Mandal Commission is also criticised for taking a static and dogmatic view of the Hindu social order. The critics pretend the caste system as a dynamic scheme and adore it for providing avenue of social mobility to the lower castes through the process of Sanskritisation. Under this traditional channel of social mobility the lower caste people Sanskritise their way of life through adopting upper caste norms and values and thus claim a higher caste status. But this traditional route of social mobility provided very limited opportunity in some regions to certain castes who were mobile economically or

TABLE 2
Representation of OBCs, SCs/STs in Central Government Services

	<i>Class I</i>			<i>Class II</i>			<i>Class III and IV</i>			<i>All Class</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>SC/ST</i>	<i>OBC</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>SC/ST</i>	<i>OBC</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>SC/ST</i>	<i>OBC</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>SC/ST</i>	<i>OBC</i>
1. Ministries/ depart- ments	11707	0840	0303	043803	005985	01742	017829	05518	01500	0013339	012343	03545
		(07·18)	(02·59)		(13·66)	(03·98)		(30·95)	(08·41)		(16·83)	(04·83)
2. Autonomous bodies, at- tached and subordinate offices...	81325	5399	4147	503337	091431	59079	322948	67118	67786	0907610	163948	131012
		(06·64)	(05·09)		(18·16)	(11·74)		(20·78)	(20·98)		(18·06)	(14·43)
3. Public sector under- takings	80994	3652	3719	365785	068566	36242	143910	45646	22689	0590689	117864	062650
		(04·51)	(04·59)		(18·74)	(09·91)		(31·72)	(15·77)		(19·95)	(10·61)
4. Total	174026	9891	8169	912925	165982	97063	484687	11282	91975	1571638	214155	19720
		(05·68)	(04·69)		(18·18)	(10·63)		(24·40)	(18·98)		(18·72)	(12·55)

Note. Figures in brackets percentages.

Sources. Report of the Backward Classes Commission (1980), First Part, Statement No. 1, Appendix VIII, p 92.

politically. The poor and powerless castes continued to suffer from the grave injustices of the caste system. Moreover, the process of Sanskritisation did not pose a challenge to the hierarchical and inegalitarian structure and ethos of the caste system. In fact, it perpetuated and reinforced the caste system through providing a safety valve for a proper channelisation of the anger and potential revolt of the lower castes. Socially mobile lower castes did not question the superiority and dominance of the upper caste but claimed only an upper berth for themselves. They followed the norms and values of the upper castes strictly and with utmost vigour so that their claim for a higher caste status was accepted by the dominant castes. Sanskritisation operated as an avenue of social mobility but not at all as a factor for transforming the inegalitarian structure of the caste system.

Not content with the limited scope of social mobility through Sanskritisation, the lower castes have asserted their caste identity to claim their share in the fruits of development. With the adoption of land reform measures such as abolition of zamindari, tenancy reforms and increasing migration of landowning upper castes/classes to urban areas, the economic condition of some of the OBCs has improved after independence. Moreover, under the new dispensation of parliamentary politics, the OBCs have got opportunities to send their own caste people to the legislature both at the centre and state levels. Gradually, they have emerged as a major force in the political arena. Hence, it is inevitable that they should be claiming their share in the control over administrative machinery to which is attached a high social status, handsome economic gains and political linkages. The recommendations of the Mandal Commission are a local reflection of this phenomenon.

Nature of Reforms

Here, we must take note of the fact that under the given framework of a weak and developing bourgeois regime, making reservation of the OBCs is a short-cut, soft and sly 'reform measure' to cater more to the psychological aspirations of

that section of the population which constitutes the majority than trigger a process of radical structural change in society. The benefits of reservation will be mainly reaped by comparatively advanced section of the OBCs. The commission recognises the fact that besides material benefits accruing to the family concerned which gets the jobs, the *psychological spin off* of this phenomenon would be tremendous as the entire community of that backward class candidates feel socially elevated the reason being that their own (caste) person would be sitting in the "corridors of power". Moreover, the commission believes that "by increasing the representation of OBCs, in government services, we give them an immediate *feeling* of participation in the governance of the country" (p 57).

Further, we must notice the fact that the real aim and game of the ruling class in adopting the policy of reservation has been to develop or recognise and co-opt an elite stratum from amongst the backward castes/classes and rule the country with an alliance and coalition of the elites belonging to upper, middle and lower castes/classes in the interests of the bourgeois-landlord classes. The policy of reservation is a 'reform measure' adopted by the ruling class to maintain the existing inegalitarian system with granting some concessions to the emerging assertive sections of the backward castes/classes. In such a scheme of governance, the poor belonging to upper, middle and lower castes have to suffer. The policy does not aim at a fundamental restructuring of the system—the task for which the left and progressive people and political forces in the country have to organise the suffering people on class line for acquiring power irrespective of their caste origin. But at the moment an opposition to the provision of reservation for OBCs would be a retrograde step because a section of the traditionally deprived and backward section of the population is going to benefit from this. Whatever reforms are possible within the given bourgeois system have to be welcomed. But without getting misled about the real nature of such measures, the left and progressive people have to

organise and fight for radical restructuring of the Indian society on egalitarian lines.

The Mandal Commission has suggested some additional measures for upliftment of OBCs besides reservation both in recruitment and promotion at all levels in services and public sector undertakings (pp 58-60). The provision of reservation also encompasses all universities and affiliated colleges, nationalised banks and all private sector undertakings which have received financial assistance from the government.

TABLE 3

**Percentage Distribution of Indian Population by Caste
and Religious Groups**

<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Group Name</i>	<i>Per Cent of Total Population</i>
I	Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes	15.05
	A-1 Scheduled Castes	07.51
	A-2 Scheduled Tribes	22.56
	Total of 'A'	
II	Non Hindu Communities, Religious Groups, etc	
	B-1 Muslims (other than STs)	11.19 (0.02)*
	B-2 Christians (other than STs)	02.16 (0.44)*
	B-3 Sikhs (other than SCs and STs)	01.67 (0.22)*
	B-4 Buddhists (other than STs)	00.67 (0.03)*
	B-5 Jains	00.47
	B-6 Total of 'B'	16.16
III	Forward Hindu Castes of Communities	
	C-1 Brahmins (including Bhumihars)	05.52
	C-2 Rajputs	03.90
	C-3 Marathas	02.21
	C-4 Jats	01.00
	C-5 Vaishyas-Bania, etc	01.88
	C-6 Kayasthas	01.07
	C-7 Other forward Hindu castes/groups	02.00
	Total of 'C'	17.58
	Total of 'A', 'B' and 'C'	56.30

IV Backward Hindu Castes and Communities

- D Remaining Hindu castes/groups, which come in the category of 'Other Backward Classes' 43·70**

V Backward Non-Hindu Communities

- E 52 per cent of religious under Section B may also be treated as OBCs 08·40
- F The approximated derived population of Other Backward Classes including non-Hindu communities 52·00 (Aggregate of D and E rounded)

VI Forward Non-Hindu Castes and Communities

= (100 — population of the OBCs, SCs and STs and Hindu Forward Castes and Communities) per cent.

= (100 — 52 + 22·5 + 17·5) per cent.

= (100 — 92·0) per cent = 8 per cent.

VII Total Population of the Forward Castes and Communities

= (17·5 + 8) per cent = 25·5 per cent.

in one form or the other. As regard educational concessions, the commission emphasises the need for "framing of integrated schemes for creating the proper environment and incentives for serious and purposeful studies". The educational package includes launching of an intensive and time-bound programme for adult education in areas with high concentration of OBC population, residential schools for backward class students, vocational training and 27 per cent reservations of seats in all scientific, technical and professional institutions run by the centre as well as the state governments along with provision for special coaching facilities for OBC students. Regarding financial assistance, the commission proposes the formation of separate financial institutions and

Notes * Figures in brackets give the population of SC and ST among these non-Hindu communities ** This is derived figure.

Sources. *Report of the Backward Classes Commission (1980)*, First Part, p 56.

co-operative societies of occupational groups of OBCs. Moreover, the commission also advises the government to set up backward classes development corporations and a separate ministry/department both at central and state levels to serve the interests of OBCs. All these are 'reform measures' which the commission thought essential.

Further, the commission has also stressed the necessity of structural changes. It observes.

It is the commission's firm conviction that a radical transformation of the existing production relations is the most important single step that can be taken for the welfare and upliftment of all other backward classes (p 60).

But the measures suggested by the commission for radical transformation of the production relations are half-hearted and dualistic. It believes that a change of structural nature in the agricultural sector is both feasible and overdue. Therefore, it urges radical land reforms. The need for strict implementation of laws regarding abolition of zamindari, ceilings and distribution of land to landless is noted in this connection.

The commission asserts that the stranglehold of the existing production relations has to be broken through radical land reforms. But half-heartedness and double standard of the commission becomes evident because it rules out the possibility of a radical transformation in the existing production relations in the industrial sector (p 60).

In fact, a fundamental change in the pattern of social relations is essential in agriculture as well as in industry and bureaucracy. This change has to be from the existing individualistic and inegalitarian system of society to a collectivist and egalitarian system. Legal and formal democracy has to be transformed into a real and operational system in our everyday life so that the ideal principles of liberty, equality and fraternity guide the behaviour of all the people in all spheres, e.g., political economic, social and organisational.

Besides introducing radical changes in agriculture it is necessary that structural changes are made in industry as well at the levels of management and ownership. As a first step, the individualistic and authoritarian mana-

gement has to be democratised with adequate representation of workers, both manual and mental. Moreover, the prevailing structure and culture of the bureaucracy has to be altered. Bureaucrats have to be made a real servant of the people and not master of the people as they are today. For this it is necessary that, in practice, they are made subordinate to the democratic bodies from the village level upwards. In addition, it has to be ensured that the poor, deprived, oppressed and exploited people who constitute the majority of the population are in majority in elected bodies at all levels i.e, from village to parliament level. This will enable the people's real representative to formulate and implement policies in favour of the masses and eradicate the scourge of poverty, unemployment, inequality, oppression and exploitation. State policy has to give utmost priority to cater to the basic needs of the masses rather than being guided by the artificial needs of the privileged strata of society who are blindly imitating the consumerist culture of the west. Decisionmaking in bureaucracy has to be made more and more democratic by involving lower section of the employees in this process. In addition, wide disparity in salary and wages should go. All these measures will go a long way in fundamental restructuring of our society on democratic and egalitarian lines. A really democratic functioning of society will finish the lure and lustre of bureaucracy. Therefore, the scramble for bureaucratic positions for acquiring high social status, power and money will also end.

But such a radical change is not possible under the framework of bourgeois sponsored programme of social reform from above of which the recommendations of the Mandal Commission are largely an example. The masses have to be involved in this gigantic task of social reconstruction. A movement of the masses is the precondition for this change.

Against
MANDAL

Plausibility and Truth

Mandal's View Of Social History

CHATURVEDI BADRINATH

Plausibility is almost always the enemy of truth. There is hardly any public document of recent times in India that illustrates this better, and more tragically, than the report of the Mandal Commission. The commission was instituted to look into the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes, and after defining such classes, to recommend steps, that could be taken for their advancement. The commission gave its report on these matters in December 1980. Its central proposal has now become law, and 27 per cent of all public appointments in the Central Government, and in other institutions managed by it, shall be reserved for identified on the basis of their low caste as socially and educationally backward classes.

Of the three issues that occupied the commission, the one that was of greatest moment to it was whether the social and educational backwardness of certain classes of the Indian people was owing directly to the Hindu caste, system, or there might be other causes of it, the generally poor economic condition the people instance. The Mandal Commission firmly concluded that the former and not the latter was the case. In this

regard it made six assumptions about Indian social history, which are also the heart of its report. Those assumptions are as follows :

Numerous Groups

Firstly, castes, the building bricks of Hindu social structure, fragmented of social consciousness of Hindu society by dividing it into numerous groups arranged in a hierarchical order on the basis of birth.

Secondly, the real triumph of the caste system lies not in upholding the Brahmin, but in conditioning the consciousness of lower castes in accepting their inferior status in the ritual hierarchy as a part of the natural order of things.

Thirdly, it was through an elaborate, complex and subtle scheme of scripture, mythology and ritual that Brahminism succeeded in giving to the caste system, and to its inequality and discrimination towards majority of the people, a moral and divine authority that has seldom been challenged effectively, even by the most ardent social reformers.

Fourthly, as exclusive custodians of higher knowledge, the Brahmins developed into a highly-cultivated community with special flair for intellectual pursuits : the Sudras, continually subjected to all kinds of deprivation, acquired all the unattractive traits of the unlettered rustic.

Fifthly, if religion was ever used as the opium of the masses, it was done in India, where a small priest class hypnotised the vast majority of the people into accepting with humility their role of servility. As labourers, cultivators, craftsmen, the Sudras were the life-blood of India's great civilisation ; yet they were treated as outcastes with no hope.

Finally, Islam and Christianity, unlike Hinduism, are totally egalitarian religions. If they, too, are infested in varying degrees with caste, the fault lies not in their religious ideals but in the fact that they were surrounded by caste-based Hinduism. Caste cannot be, therefore, the basis for identifying socially and education backward classes among the Muslims and Christians of India. For them some other rough and ready criterion of backwardness must be found.

Scholarly Opinion

To the Mandal Commission, whose exact words are reproduced above, these were of course not assumptions but established facts. To prove this it assembled what on first sight would appear to be altogether a formidable apparatus of scholarly opinion and scientific method. But if you look at it closely, you will soon discover that there is little in it that supports the assumptions which the commission made. Nor is there anything in the published works of the Indian sociologists it has so cheerfully quoted, Professor M.N. Srinivas to take one example from which can be drawn anything like the portrait the Mandal Commission drew of Hindu society. But when untruth is presented in the clothes of scholarship, the damage it can do to the minds of the people is simply incalculable, for it seems so eminently plausible.

What the Mandal Commission actually did in its report was to resurrect, practically word for word, the early, British missionary denunciation of India and its people. That phase of abusive Christianity, without question a contradiction in terms, lasted for a century, from 1813, the year in which the East India Company reluctantly opened India to British missionaries, to 1910, when the World Missionary Conference met at Edinburgh. But that time it had become evident that abuses would not do. The conference admitted that "more harm has been done in India than in any other country by missionaries who have lacked the wisdom to appreciate the nobler side of the religion which they have laboured so indefatigably to supplant".

In maintaining that castes had fragmented the social consciousness of Hindu society by dividing it into numerous groups, what the Mandal Commission did was to resurrect also the exact argument of British rule that since India was not socially cohesive, with whom could British government negotiate as regards the Indian demand for greater Indian participation in making laws and in the administration of their country. This question came up again and again — until the division of India and independence from British rule. The plausibility of the

British-Mandal view, concealing its untruth, has had tragic consequences for the people of India.

Above all, in maintaining that the social and educational backwardness of a vast number of the people of India, flowed from the castes system, what the Mandal Commission did was to resurrect the famous controversy on this subject between Bhimrao Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi. The most central part of the commission's report is also a complete paraphrase of what Ambedkar had said, with unrestrained anger about the caste system as a whole and not only about its historical disorders, in an undelivered speech prepared for the 1936 conference of the *Jai Pat Todak Mandal* (or, translated into English, the society for the abolition of castes.) This was published by him soon thereafter, and revised by Gandhi in the *Harijan* in July, 1936

The issue between Ambedkar and Gandhi remained unresolved because the issue itself was wrongly formulated. It continues to be formulated wrongly even today. The main question is not whether the concepts of *Varna* and *Jati* (or caste proper) are synonymous or in theory opposed to each other (this engaged Bhimrao and Gandhi). Nor is the key question whether the advocacy of a man always following his ancestral calling, said to be an essential feature of the caste system, was also an essential part of the *Dharma-Sastras*.

Impractical Ideal

The Mahatma maintained that it was, and there was nothing objectionable in it. To Ambedkar it was "not only an impossible and impractical ideal, but it is also morally an indefensible ideal." Both of them should have known the established fact of Indian history that the Brahmins often took to arms and became Kings, the Kshatriyas sometimes became philosophers and spiritual teachers and the Sudras were as often Kings and also great teachers of *Dharma*.

Bhimrao Ambedkar expressed a profound truth when he said: "The best of men cannot be moral if the basis of relationship between them and their fellows is fundamentally a wrong relationship." That truth is a Dharmic truth and has

been at the very centre of Indian civilisation. Whatever was a negation of the right law of relationship between one man and other beings, was *Adharma*.

The way the caste system threatened to develop, as it seemed to have in the times even of the *Mahabharata*, was *Adharma*. That remained so throughout the unequivocal Dharmic tradition, in the *Mahabharata* most of all. But one must first seriously try to understand what the Dharmic ideal of human relationships was, and then judge all social facts of today in that light. A steadfast refusal to do so, manifest in the Mandal report, and also in much of the modern scholarship relating to India can only produced errors of perception, and then unhappiness and suffering.

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

The Mandal Formula

Backwardness : Castes Vs Individuals

M.N. SRINIVAS

South India has for decades had a very different attitude from the North to reservations of other backward castes (OBCs). The movement of the backward castes in the South for reservation started as long ago as 1919 in the princely state of Mysore, and soon extended to the Madras presidency. This was basically a non-Brahmin movement aimed at ending the virtual monopoly of just three per cent of the population on jobs in the modern sector—government service, higher education, the professions. But during and just after the British Raj, there was no backward classes movement in North India comparable to that in the South. The reasons for this need to be researched.

One reason was that in the North the modern sector was not the monopoly of a tiny hereditary elite of Brahmins, but shared with diverse groups such as Kayasthas, Bania, and some elite sections of Muslims. Further, the educated Bengali was a conspicuous element in the bureaucracies and learned professions in North India. He drew a lot of flak as an “outsider”. The Hindu-Muslim divide was also sharper in the North, inhibiting the rise of a backward classes movement.

At first, the only reservation was the mandatory one for the SCs and STs. Even today Orissa and West Bengal do not seem to have any reservation for the OBCs. In 1977-78, Mr Karpoori Thakur, then Chief Minister of Bihar, tried to introduce 30 per cent reservation for the OBCs, and this provoked a violent outburst in which 118 people were reported to have died. In 1985, Madhya Pradesh raised reservations from 28 per cent to 82 per cent, provoked violent riots and arson, and was forced to withdraw the other.

Lack of Consensus

The government of Mr Madhavsinh Solanki in Gujarat fell similarly in 1985 following the introduction of reservation in promotions to posts in medical colleges. In other words North India has not had a consensus favouring reservation for the OBCs, a consensus evident in the South.

This explains why the reaction to Mandal has been far more violent in the North. The chances are that this violence will be especially great this time since the leaders of the backward castes seem determined to teach a lesson to the striking students, who mainly belong to the upper castes.

Mr Devi Lal during his brief tenure as Deputy Prime Minister, not only emphasised the importance of rural interests, but sharpened the rural-urban divide. The Hindu Muslim divide is also sharper as result of the controversy over the Babri Masjid. It looks as though our politicians are vying with each other to destroy the nationalist edifice built with such great effort and sacrifice by Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel.

North India illustrates far more clearly than South India the dynamics of the castes system in rural areas. Till the 1950s, dominance was enjoyed in the rural areas by the AJGAR group (Ahirs, Jats, Gujars and Rajputs). The wealth and power of these castes increased considerably as a result of the Green Revolution, and all of them moved well and truly into the modern sector. At the same time the intermediates, castes, Kurmis, Keoria, Lodhas and others also benefited. There is considerable economic and social heterogeneity in

each of these castes. Hence the dubbing of entire castes as "backward" by the Mandal Commission is highly irrational. The benefits are likely to go to the better-off and more influential in these castes at the expense of the poor and backward. At the same time, very poor individuals from castes not dubbed as backward are excluded.

Since the Second World War, medium and big landowners in rural areas have benefited from selling their surplus grain in the black market.

Important result

There was a kind of rough justice in this since under the levy system the government bought a good portion of the crop at lower-than-market rates for the public distribution system in cities. The big farmers were thus able to save money which was then invested in the post-war years in urban housing, buses and lorries, rice mills, cinema houses and so on. In the process, the richer peasants learnt to use both the rural and urban systems to their advantage and set a model for others to emulate.

An important result was the sharp increase in inter-caste heterogeneity. This is dramatically illustrated in the poorer members of a caste working as bonded labourers in the homes of rich landowners of the same caste. This heterogeneity is greatest among the dominant, land-owning castes and minimal among the small, poor ones.

Caste-based reservation results in the establishment of oligopolies among elites in OBCs. The addition of an economic criterion is not of much help either. The division of OBCs into less and more backward is better, but even here large castes benefit at the expense of small ones. In short group-based criteria paradoxically, benefit only individuals, not entire groups. And such individuals are frequently cut off from their social bases, except when they are politicians.

Clearly, the way out is to opt for objective criteria applicable to individuals and not hereditary or other groups. That way the poor from every category are helped. Criteria such as parental income, levels of education, occupation (manual or non-manual, unskilled or skilled), place of residence rural

or urban), and asset structure can be used to determine the level of backwardness of a person. With the computer facilities available in the country it is possible to provide every eligible schoolgoer with a card profiling his backwardness.

Nearly 25 years ago I wrote two articles in *The Statesman* arguing that numerous castes had developed vested interest in backwardness and that the solution to this lay in developing "neutral indices" to determine the backwardness of individuals. Needless to say, no one took the slightest notice of them.

Why did the framers of the Constitution use the terms "Scheduled Castes" and "Scheduled Tribes" in one case and "socially and educationally backward classes" in another? If they had desired that the benefits had to go to backward castes surely they would have said so plainly. Sociologically speaking, "class" and "caste" are distinct if not opposed terms. How then did "backward classes" come to be interpreted as "backward castes". There is a puzzle if not a problem demanding an explanation. (To equate "backward classes" with "backward castes" and then to assert that the introduction of reservation on economic grounds alone is to indulge not in "double speak" but "treble speak.")

Social and educational backwardness are best tackled by anti-poverty programmes. Backwardness is due in large measure to poverty and the many ills that go with it. Malnutrition affects productivity, illiteracy is inseparable from ignorance and superstition. The lack of access to shelter, clothing and hygiene and sanitation makes people backward. There is such a thing as a "culture of poverty."

Many Cleavages

Reservations go to a small number of the better-off members of the castes concerned. Anti-poverty programmes benefit large numbers of the poor everywhere, and so offer the best route to tackle backwardness. Most important, they do not further deepen the many cleavages already present in society.

The case of the Schedule 1 Castes is qualitatively different. They have been oppressed and exploited by all the others, and subjected to shameful discrimination. The constitutional

provision for them and the Scheduled Tribes, who have long been isolated from the mainstreams, needs to be respected. But even here care should be taken to see that the benefits go to really poor, and that there is a time limit to reservation.

Caste is a terribly divisive institution. Given that literacy is 36 per cent and that 70 per cent of the people live in rural areas, castes still has a lot of clout. During the last 43 years, it has been used successfully in mobilising people during elections. Reservations have further strengthened the institution. It is high time we started thinking about where such policies are leading us. We need statesmanship and not political gimmickry which has the potential for destroying the cumulative achievements of 150 years of nationalist struggle.

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

For
MANDAL

The Plight of Brahmins

MEENAKSHI JAIN

The Mandal Commission report marks the culmination of the attempt at social engineering that began with the Christian missionary (followed by British governmental) campaigns against the Brahmin community in the early part of the 19th century. It was not accidental that Brahmins emerged as the principal target of British attacks. Britishers of all pursuits, missionaries, administrators and orientalist, were quick to grasp their pivotal role in the Indian social arrangement.

They were all agreed that religious ideas and practices underlay the entire social structure and that, as custodians of the sacred tradition, Brahmins were the principal integrating force. This made them the natural target of those seeking to fragment, indeed atomise, Indian society. This was as true of the British conquerors as it was of Muslims rulers in the preceding centuries. Mandal takes off from where the British left.

Worst suspicions

The British were not wrong in their distrust of educated Brahmins in whom they saw a potential threat to their supremacy in India. For instance, in 1879 the Collector of Tanjore in a communication to Sir James Caird, member of the Famine

Commission, stated that "there was no class (except Brahmins) which was so hostile to the English."

The predominance of the Brahmins in the freedom movement confirmed the worst British suspicions of the community. Innumerable CID report of the period commented on Brahmin participation at all levels of the nationalist movement. In the words of an observer. "If any community could claim credit for driving the British out of the country, it was the Brahmin community. Seventy per cent of those who were felled by British bullets were Brahmins."

To counter what they perceived a Brahminial challenge, the British launched on the one hand a major ideological attack on the Brahmins and, on the other, incited non-Brahmin caste Hindus to press for preferential treatment, a poly that was to prove, equally successful vis-a-vis the Muslims.

In the attempt to rewrite Indian history, Brahmins began to be portrayed as oppressors and tyrants who wilfully kept down the rest of the populace. Their role in the development of Indian society was deliberately slighted. In ancient times, for example. Brahmins played a major part in the spread of new methods of cultivation (especially the use of the plough and manure) in backward and aboriginal areas. The *Krsi-parasara*, compiled during this period, is testimony to their contribution in this field.

But far more important was the Brahmin contribution to the integration of society. So influenced are we by the British view of our part that we completely ignore the fact that the principle by which Brahmins achieved the integration of various tribes and communities was unique in world history.

This was perhaps the only case where all incoming groups were accommodated on their own terms. All aspects of their beliefs and behaviour patterns were accepted as legitimate and no attempt was made to compel them to surrender or change their distinctive lifestyles. Each group was left to evolve and change according to its internal rhythm. What a contrast to the Christian method of conversion by the sword and their efforts to obliterate all traces of the previous history of all converts.

Apart from misrepresenting the Indian past, the British actively encouraged anti-Brahmin sentiments. A number of scholars have commented on their involvement in the anti-Brahmin movement in South India. As a result of their machinations non-Brahmins turned on the Brahmins with a ferocity that has few parallels in Indian history. This was all the more surprising in that for centuries Brahmins and non-Brahmins has been active partners and collaborators in the task of political and social management.

Little Difference

Some British observers themselves conceded that the picture of the Brahmin as oppressor was overdrawn and that in reality there was little difference in the condition of the Brahmin and the rest of the native population. H.T. Colebrooke, one of the early Sanskrit scholars wrote "Daily observation shows even Brahmins exercising the menial profession of a Sudra...it may be received as a general maxim, that the occupation, appointed for each tribe, is entitled merely to a preference.

"Every profession, with few exceptions, is open to every description of persons; and the discouragement, arising from religious prejudices, is not greater than what exists in Great Britain from the effects of Municipal and Corporation laws "

The British census operations that began in the latter part of the 19th century produced further distortions in the Indian system. The British sought to interpret the caste system in the light of their own pet theories. H.H. Risley who directed the 1901 census operations was, for example, determined to demonstrate that "race sentiment" formed the basis of the caste system and that social precedence was based on the scale of racial purity. The same race theory played havoc in Europe in the form of Nazism and has now been fully repudiated.

The British, unmindful of the complexities and intricacies of the social arrangement, sought to achieve standardisation by placing all *jatis* in the four *varnas* or in the categories of outcastes and aborigines. As a result they destroyed the flexibility that was so vital for the proper functioning of the system. The census operations raised caste consciousness to a feverish

pitch, incited caste animosities and led to an all-round hardening of the system.

Frantic Efforts

They led to frantic efforts at Sanskritisation and upward mobility, so very different from the flexibility of earlier times. When the system was made rigid everyone wanted to be member of a higher *varna*. Caste consequently became a tool in the political, religious and cultural battles that the Hindus fought amongst themselves.

It is significant that the census operations coincided with the attempt to reorganise the army on the basis of the martial race theory. At about that time the British were also beginning to raise questions about the relative balance of Hindus and Muslims in the public services and about the "monopoly" of certain castes in the new education. There was also talk of the conspiracy of certain castes to overthrow their rule.

The forces unleashed by the British continued to gather momentum. The myth of the omnipotent Brahmin had been so successfully sold that most Indians missed the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In recent years, however, a number of studies have appeared that detail the downward mobility that has been the chief characteristic of the Brahmin community particularly since independence.

Financially the Brahmins have been very hard hit. State laws combined with fragmentation of land have had the effect of substantially reducing the size of family holdings so much so that most Brahmins today find it difficult to eke out a living from land. Traditional occupations like family and temple priesthood, recitation of the Vedas and practice of Ayurvedic medicine no longer prove remunerative nor command respect.

A study of the Brahmin community in a district in Andhra Pradesh, (*Brahmins of India* by J. Radhakrishna, Published by Chugh Publications) reveals that all purohits today live below the poverty line. Eighty per cent of those surveyed stated that their poverty and traditional style of dress and hair (tuft) had made them the butt of ridicule. Financial constraints coupled

with the existing system of reservations for the "backward classes" prevented them from providing secular education to their children.

In fact according to this study there has been an overall decline in the number of Brahmin students. The average income of Brahmins being less than that of non-Brahmins a high percentage of Brahmin students drop out at the intermediate level. In the 5-18 year age group, 44 per cent Brahmin students stopped education at the primary level and 36 per cent at the pre-matriculation level. The study also found that 55 per cent of all Brahmins lived below the poverty line, that is below a per capita income of Rs. 65 a month. Since 45 per cent the total population of India is officially stated to be below the poverty line, it follows that the percentage of destitute Brahmins is 10 per cent higher than the all-India figure. There is no reason to believe that condition of Brahmins in other parts of the country is any different.

Appalling Poverty

In this connection it would be revealing to quote the per capita income of various communities as stated by the Karnataka Finance Minister in the State Assembly on July 1, 1978: Christian Rs. 1562, Vokkaligas Rs. 914. Muslims Rs. 794, Scheduled Castes Rs. 680, Scheduled Tribes Rs. 577 and Brahmins Rs. 537.

Appalling poverty compelled many many Brahmins to migrate to towns leading to spatial dispersal and consequent decline in their local influence and institutions. Brahmins initially turned to government jobs and modern occupations such as law and medicine. But preferential policies for the non-Brahmins have forced the Brahmins to retreat in these spheres as well. According to the Andhra Pradesh study, the largest percentage of Brahmins today are employed as clerks, followed by teachers. Over 15 per cent are employed as domestic servants. The unemployment rate among them is as high as 75 per cent.

Clearly it is time to set up and see reality as it is before we complete the task the British began—the atomisation of Indian society and annihilation of Indian civilization.

Is an efficient public service irrelevant in India ?

Judiciary Threatened on Job Reservation

H M. SEERVAI

A PTI message dated New Delhi, August 10, and the Door-darshan news bulletin that night stated that the Prime Minister, Mr. V.P. Singh "today assured the Rajya Sabha that the Judiciary would not stand in the way of filling of the vacancies in Government jobs by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe candidates, (and) "that if the Judiciary stood in the way, we will with your cooperation (the Opposition's) remove that hindrance". The Prime Minister was also reported to have said that the Government would accept the verdict of the courts in the Ram Janamabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, whatever that decision may be.

Judiciary Threatened

The extreme gravity and dangerous nature of the Prime Minister's observations about the Judiciary have not attracted attention, since they come from a Prime Minister who is never tired of saying that in a great democracy like ours there must

be open discussion, debate and full scope for dissent. The statement that the Government would accept the decision of the courts in respect of the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute a decision on a difficult, complicated matter shows that when Government wants to get out of a difficult situation, full confidence is reposed in the courts. Surely, the same confidence must be shown in the courts in their decision, **whatever it may be**, in filling up vacancies in Government jobs.

Besides, how could the Prime Minister assure the House that the Judiciary would not stand in the way of reserving jobs? For he would be the first to admit that it would be most improper for any member of the Government to obtain an assurance from the courts that they would decide in a particular way. It is essential that the Prime Minister should withdraw the assurance he gave to Parliament, and his threat to the Judiciary, History shows that dictators professing to act for the "good of the people" begin or end by destroying an independent Judiciary which is a bastion of the people's safety and freedom. The "Emergency" declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 25 June 1975 is a classic example of this truth in our country, although, fortunately, her dictatorship lasted for less than two years.

A minister's oath provides, *inter alia*, "I, A.B., do swear that...I will faithfully and conscientiously discharge the duties of my office and I will do right to all manner of people accordance with the Constitution and the law without fear or favour, affection or illwill". The oath of a chief justice or a judge of the Supreme Court or a High Court, provides, *inter alia*, that "I, A.B.,.....will duly and faithfully and to the best of **my ability, knowledge and judgment** perform the duties of my office without fear or favour, affection or illwill **and that I will uphold the Constitution and the laws**" emphasis supplied). The Minister's oath requires him to act in accordance with the Constitution and the law whereas the judicial oath requires the judge to uphold and defend the Constitution and the law.

This is as it should be, for minister give effect the Constitution and the law when they take execution action and the judges defend and protect the Constitution and the laws by bringing their ability, knowledge of the law and judgment to bear on every issue, by deciding it without fear or favour, affection or

illwill. The threat held out against judges would require the judicial oath to be altered so as to run: "I, A.B....having been appointed the Chief Justice (or a judge) of X court will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India as by law established and I will uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India and against the best of my ability, knowledge of the law and judgment I will perform the duties of my office by upholding the policies of the Government of the day and by rejecting everything that stands in the way of implementing those policies."

Constitutional Provisions

The origin of reservations is well known. For hundreds of years, "untouchables" eked out a miserable existence, because their touch and, in certain provinces, even their shadow, polluted the higher caste Hindus. Article 17 of our Constitution removed this great blot on the Hindu community by abolishing "untouchability and by making it a crime for anyone to enforce disabilities arising from "untouchability". And Article 25(2)(B) threw open to "untouchables" Hindu religious temples of a public character.

These measures were taken to bring Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) into the mainstream of national life. To attain that goal, reservations in legislatures were made for a period of 10 years, in the belief that within 10 years the necessity for reservation would disappear. Further it is not generally known that for a person to belong to SCs he must profess the Hindu or the Sikh religion as required by the Presidential (SCs) order, 1950. So the classification made between persons belonging to SCs and other persons is based on caste and religion.

Article 15(1) provides that no citizen shall be discriminated against on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. To this provision, Article 15(4) provides an important exception. For it gives the state a discretionary power to make any provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward class of citizens or for the SCs and the STs. Article 16 provides that every citizen shall have equality of opportunity in matters of public employment

for appointment to any office under the state, which opportunity cannot be denied on the ground only of caste, religion, race, sex, descent, place of birth residence or any of them. However, Article 16(4) makes an exception, namely, that it conferred a discretion on the state to make reservation for appointment to an office or post in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the state is not adequately represented in the service.

Consigned to backwardness ?

Since our Prime Minister repeatedly says that **secularism** is the only solution in a democratic country like ours, where there are a number of languages, religions, races castes and creeds, it would follow that any action taken or law passed which would perpetuate and divide the people on the basis of caste and religion must be rejected, except as a temporary expedient for a short period as was provided for by the framers of our Constitution. The emotional attachment of Mr. Justice Krishna Iyer to SCs and STs is strongly reflected in his judgments in the Supreme Court. Even so, he realised that the cause of socially and economically backward classes and of the SCs and STs would be gravely injured if their disabilities were treated as permanent. In his judgment in the **Karamachari Sangh case** he said.

“It freedom, justice and equal opportunity to unfold one’s own personality belong alike to **bhangi** and **brahmin**, prince and pauper, if (they are) to feel the social transformation which Art. 16(4) promises, the State must apply equalising techniques which will enlarge their opportunities and thereby progressively diminish the need for props. The success of State action under Art. 16(4) consists in the speed with which result oriented reservation withers ways as no longer a need, not in the ever-widening and everlasting operation of an exception Art. 16(4) as if it were a **super fundamental right to continue backward all the time.** (emphasis supplied) to lend immortality to the reservation policy is to defeat its **raison d’etre** : to politicise this provision for communal support and party ends is to subvert the solemn undertaking of Art. 16(1), to casteify ‘reservations’ even beyond the dismal groups of backward-most

people, euphemistically described as SCs and STs is to run a grave constitutional risk. Caste, ipso facto, is not class in a secular State". (A.I.R 1981 S.C. at p. 306).

I wish to make it clear that I wholeheartedly approve of the goal of bringing socially and educationally backward classes and SCs and STs into the mainstream of national life. And I would approve effective measures which would make them stand on their own feet. In a public lecture which I delivered about 10 years ago, I outlined a scheme which would provide such effective measures. I incorporated that scheme in the 3rd edition of my **Constitutional Law of India**, (Vol. I 1983), and I will give that outline later in this article.

Esprit de corps

The power to make reservations for socially and educationally backward classes of persons and for SCs and STs is conferred on the State, first, by way of a discretionary power, and, secondly by way of an exception to the principle against discrimination on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex, or descent. That principle lies at the heart of our Constitution, for to discriminate in favour of one class is to discriminate against all other classes. Confining myself to reservation to appointments and posts in public service, we must remember Article 335 which provides: "The claim of the members of the SCs and STs shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State" emphasis supplied). In a great democratic country like ours, an efficient public service is essential for the welfare and happiness of its people. Recent exhortations to public sector undertakings to improve their performance emphasizes this obvious truth.

Further, in considering reservations in public employment, courts have to deal with 5 parties: (1) the State, to whose services persons are recruited by open competition in examinations held by independent public service commissions (ii) the public, as the very phrase "public servant" shows; (iii) the persons who are discriminated against, by reservation in favour

of members of SCs and STs ; (iv) members of SCs and STs in whose favour discrimination is made by fixing reservation quotas ; and (v) the service, that is, each service considered as a whole. A service which lacks *esprit de corps*, that is, consciousness of and pride in belonging to a particular service, lacks an element essential to an efficient and harmonious administration. To balance the claim of the 5 parties requires a critical analysis and examination and it cannot be determined by anger at a great social wrong or to secure electoral support. Leaving out a large number of Government servants in service who used to be described as "menial" but are now described as "class IV employees", reservations for SCs and STs have been tried out for early 40 years with the gradual erosion of standards to be reached by SC and ST candidates in order to be eligible for employment in service. The erosion will be found described at great length in the *Karmchari Sangh case*. But one thing is clear. A reservation quota for socially and educationally backward class of persons and for SCs and STs necessarily implies that those who enter public services as a result of a reservation quota are, meritwise, substantially inferior to those who enter the public service by selection in order of merit by open competition in examinations designed to select the best candidates. There could be no *esprit de corps* in a service in which, in matters of promotion, people with superior qualifications are subordinated to people with admittedly inferior qualifications. If nearly 40 years of applying the remedy of reservations has failed to produce the desired result, it is obvious that an attempt must be made to find another remedy which will produce the desired result.

A scheme

I share the general view that, by and large, intellectual capacity and general ability are more or less evenly divided among the people. A successful attempt to remove the handicap of SCs and ST children must therefore begin with the school, since it is not practicable to begin with the family except very indirectly. The central idea of my scheme is to adopt measures which would put SC and ST children as near

as circumstances permit, to children more favourably placed. One of the most serious handicaps of SC and ST children is that their parents find it necessary to increase the family income by making even small children earn a small income by part time work, e.g. by selling newspapers. The time so taken up is withdrawn from studies and other activities of the school,—a handicap from which children more fortunately placed are free. The compensatory measures to remove this handicap are: free education, free supply of text books, and other school requisites, free meals, free uniforms where prescribed. To remove the need for SC and ST children to earn by part time work, it is necessary to provide a daily stipend or grant in respect on each SC and ST child.

We must begin with the primary school, for the object of the scheme is not only to put SC and ST children on a level with other children, but also to give SC and ST children an opportunity of showing their talents and general ability. Before the SC and ST child's primary education is completed, some students each class will have shown promise as students. Special attention should be paid to them in secondary schools, and in addition to the daily stipend, merit scholarships reserved for SC and ST students would be given on their examination results in recognition of their work and also to encourage them to further effort in their studies. And these proposals must be applied to high school education in colleges, with the difference that the daily stipend and merit scholarships reserved for SC and ST students would have to be increased. If this scheme is followed, then by the time that the ablest among SC and ST students come to compete for public service, they will be able to do so on equal terms with other candidates. This would transform public service by making it efficient and restoring is *esprit de corps*, because every one of member of it will have been selected on his own merit and not by accident of caste, religion and descent.

Our courts are oppressed by the feeling that unless reservations are made for socially and educationally backward classes and for SC and ST, in public services and also in graduate and post-graduate colleges, they cannot be brought into the mainstream of national life. And yet, oddly enough, the

courts say that they are not concerned with other measures, which would bring those classes into the mainstream of national life. But this overlooks the fact that Article 15(4) does not expressly mention "reservation". This article uses the general expression "the State may make any special provision for the advancement of socially and educationally backward class of citizens and for SCs and STs".

The scheme I have outlined above makes a special provision for educational advancement. But special provisions include every kind of assistance with the state can give for the advancement of backward classes and SCs and STs into the mainstream of national life. Illustratively, those measures will include grant of land either free or on nominal rent, the grant being non-transferable (i.e. to money lenders etc.) and by declaring such transfers to be void. Further, the state can supply seeds and agricultural implements, supply expert advice as how to improve the yield of land, provide for marketing the produce and the like. Such special provisions would also include schemes for training backward classes to pursue trade or small business which would bring in a reasonable income. No doubt the details of my scheme will have to be worked out. I need hardly add that if there is a better scheme than mine it should be adopted.

No doubt the scheme which I have outlined will require substantial expenditure and, even more, governmental effort to make it a success. But Union and State governments which can afford to write off debts said to be about Rs. 16,000 crore, ought not to grudge the expenditure of relatively small sums of money in order to bring backward classes and SCs and STs into the mainstream of national life, to increase their well-being and happiness and to ensure an efficient public service and administration.

Sinning for the future

It was said that those actively opposing reservations in jobs and in colleges were hooligans or mischief makers. This is patently untrue. In his Independence Day broadcast our Prime Minister qualified this by appealing to the youth to disregard

their selfish interests and work for the good of the country. This is adding insult to injury. Parents belonging to Hindu and non-Hindu advanced classes found that their children of high ability, capable of giving a good account of themselves and enriching the life of our country, were deprived of educational facilities and employment in public service by classes of people who, admittedly, were lacking in such capacity and ability. After our Constitution came into force in 1950 many parents were constrained to tell their gifted children that they must put up with this injustice for a limited period, because of the grave injustice done to SCs and STs. Such boys and girls have endured that injustice not for 10 years, not for 20 years, not for 30 years, but now for 40 years. If we condemn injustice of the past in strong and unmistakable language, the future will condemn the injustice perpetrated by our own governments for a period of 40 years. If reason and persuasion and the claims of justice are to be ignored by whoever is in power, and where there is no means of a legal redress, extra-legal means, violent or non-violent will be employed to secure it. Non-violence is attached to the revered name of Mahatma Gandhi as a powerful weapon to secure a just and desired goal. But his own experience showed that non-violence frequently turned into violence to achieve such goal. If these evils are to be avoided reservations must be phased out in a period of 10 to 15 years by reducing the reservation by 20 per cent every two or three years and not by continuing job reservations as the Government proposed to do.

Courtesy : *Indian Express*.

Rank 413? So sorry.
Rank 41246?? But of course...

Three Sets of Facts on Mandal

ARUN SHOURIE

Kerala conducts a common examination for entrance to medical and engineering colleges. Marks scored in this examination are not normally revealed, Ranks however, are available !

This year about 20,000 candidates wrote the examination for the 700 MBBS seats available in the State.

A candidate having been born to a "forward caste" had to rank **412 or higher** to get in. A candidate from the Ezhava caste—recognised as a backward one in Kerala - however got a seat though his rank was 1605. A Muslim candidate—Kerala has reservations for Muslim "OBCs"—got in although he ranked 1752. A Latin Catholic, again an "OBC", got in although he ranked 2653. A scheduled caste candidate got in although he ranked 4409. The really fortunate one of course, was the candidate who could register against the quota for scheduled tribes.

Some way to select doctors.

Some way to encourage our youth to strive for excellence. The pattern is repeated in State after State, may colleagues report from the State capitals.

To qualify in the corresponding examination in Andhra a candidate from a caste for which, there is no reservation must secure a minimum of 45 per cent, a candidate from a caste for which there are reservations has no minimum to cross.

Chandigarh's prestigious Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGI) is no exception. The general category candidate must secure at least 50 per cent marks, candidates from the scheduled castes, backward castes and scheduled tribes have no minimum to cross. They may get in with 20 per cent or 15 per cent or 11 per cent as they have to compete only amongst themselves, ie, only among those among themselves who do not qualify on merit.

In Karnataka a scheduled caste candidate need score only 67 per cent to qualify for the medical colleges, an "OBC" candidate 75 per cent but the one whose caste has not been annointed in this way must score a minimum of 90 per cent.

In Madhya Pradesh this year the cut-off mark for general candidates seeking admission in medical and engineering colleges was 66.6 per cent, but for candidates from the scheduled castes it was 35.7 per cent. Nominally the minimum marks for passing in the State are 40 per cent.

In Rajasthan the corresponding figures this year were 65 per cent for general category candidates, 48 per cent for OBC candidates and 42 per cent for scheduled caste candidates. In Punjab 50 per cent for the general category and 25 per cent for the scheduled castes. In Gujarat 60 per cent and 45 per cent; in Goa 79 per cent and 48 per cent.

For seats in UP's engineering colleges the cut-off mark for the merit quota was 64.3 per cent this year, it was lowered first to 60 per cent and eventually to 58.3 per cent. Even so, it remained two and a third times the cut off mark for candidates in the reserved category which was 26 per cent.

Tightening for meritorious, letting go for others

It is not just that the lowest qualifying marks for the reserved

seats are 10 to 15 to 25 per cent lower in State after State. It is that in practice because of the intense competition for the ever dwindling proportion of seats in the open category the marks a candidate must secure to bag one of these far exceed the qualifying barrier, because of the paucity of candidates from castes which have wrested reservations the marks that a person aiming for one of the reserved seats fall lower and lower by the year, in many years well below what has been prescribed as the "minimum qualifying percentage".

Thus in Bihar the minimum qualifying marks for admission to medical colleges are 50 per cent and 40 per cent for the open and reserved categories. In actual fact candidates had to secure 70 per cent and more to make it in the former category, while in the latter case the qualifying marks themselves have had to be lowered to 35 per cent, to 33 per cent to fill in the quotas available !

In UP the qualifying marks for the medical colleges are 55 per cent for the general category and 40 per cent for the reserved quota. In actual fact candidates in the former category getting below 77 per cent could not get a seat, while in the latter those with 48 per cent did so.

In Madhya Pradesh the qualifying mark in the examinations held five years ago was 40 per cent. This year to fill the reservation quotas in medical and engineering colleges the minimum acceptable mark has been lowered to 25 per cent.

In Punjab also the minimum qualifying marks for scheduled caste candidates for medical colleges have been lowered from 40 per cent to 25 per cent.

In Brief :

*Vast differences in what is required for candidates merely on account of their birth.

*Severe competition for the seats in the general category leading to high qualifying marks, and on the other hand progressive relaxation of the requisite standards to fill up reserved quotas.

*The latter relaxations being carried to frightfully low levels.

Subsequent performance

My colleagues tried next to obtain data on the comparative performance in subsequent examinations of students who had entered on merit and those who had entered on the reserved quotas. Precise figures were not available though authorities in several of the colleges they visited said that the latter continued to fare poorly: They do not strive as hard, the authorities said, even when they had comparable facilities for coping—hostel accommodation, nourishment etc.

They take more years, and a large number of trials to complete the courses and eventually they score substantially lower marks in the completion examinations.

Move now to the other end of the spectrum: From entry to colleges not just to entry to Government service but to advancement in it. At present most States reserve seats not only at entry to Government service but also in promotions. Some parts of the Central Government also do so, the railways for instance.

My colleagues report the ill-effects this has had in State after State, department after department. The Railways, the medical services in UP, the education set up in Kerala—in each instance they found widespread demoralization and resentment among the general category employees, and bitterness between them and the reserved category employees.

Apart from this general vitiation, several specific features stand out.

The first feature arises from the fact that in spite of relaxed standards, special recruitment drives and all, it has been extremely difficult to fill the quotas set aside for these castes. Naturally, the lucky ones who get in at this stage leap-frog to the higher posts. Thus, for instance, in spite of strenuous efforts to locate doctors from scheduled castes and tribes it has been possible to fill only about 6 per cent of the posts in UP's medical and health department with persons from these castes. But the law prescribes that 20 per cent of promotions too shall be reserved for doctors from these castes. As a result 'Dr. 'A'—we are not giving the names though these are available—was promoted to the post of joint director super-

seding 100 doctors, Dr. 'B' was promoted to that post superseding 100 doctors. Dr. 'C' superseding 900 doctors. Doctor 'D' received the scale superseding 1600 doctors. Dr. 'E' was appointed Chief Medical Officer of a large city superseding 1100 doctors. Dr. 'F' was appointed Chief Medical Officer of another large city near Delhi seperseding 1500 doctors.

The result ? "The medical and health department" of the UP government" writes my colleague S.K. Tripathi from Lucknow "has been seething with resentment because of large scale supersessions which have resulted from having the 20 per cent quota even in promotions .."

Four consequences follow :

*they take far fever years to reach the high posts than the general category of employees.

*they reach much higher posts by retirement than the latter.

*as they ascend to higher posts when they are still young, the promotion prospects of others—the general category ones over whom they have leap-frogged are blocked, permanently as far as this generation of employees is concerned.

*because of these accelerated promotion, because of crash recruitment drives in which persons from reserved castes are inducted directly to higher posts, and because of the pernicious workings of the roster system, in several departments an overwhelming proportion of the top posts are now occupied by persons who have climbed up the reserved route. The figures are startling in many instances: All but three of the twenty top posts in the general education department in a State, reports a colleague. Six of six posts in the highest grade in a claims office in South eastern Railways, railway employees report on the basis of documents lodged in courts ; 21 out of 29 posts in the next highest grade ; 16 of 26 posts of office superintendents in a chief works manager's office in Western Railways.

As the roster binds the department or enterprise to fill posts numbered such and thus only by persons from the reserved castes, the minimum requirements which have been laid for those posts—for instance, that the person must have served 'X'

number of years in the preceding post—are routinely put aside for these employees. As are mandatory departmental examinations which are meant to ensure that the person has at least the minimum abilities necessary for the job at the level to which he is being promoted. The railway employees draw our attention to specific cases. 'A' joins as a casual waterman in August 1958, by 1980 he is office superintendent, the highest post in Grade III not because he has acquired additional skills which his peers do not have but because of his caste. He would have gone much higher by now but for the fact that he is not even a matriculate... 'B' is appointed clerk in mid-1958 ranking 84 in the "seniority list." By 1974 July having secured four promotions within Grade III, he is promoted as Assistant Personnel Officer to Grade II. By March 1982 he is Divisional Personnel Officer. He is on the verge today of being promoted to the post of Junior Administrative Officer again not because he has gathered additional qualifications, over the railways officers, but because of his caste... 'C' joins railways as a *safaiwala*. He is appointed a clerk against a reserved quota post.

He ranks 131 in the "seniority list" at this time. Within years, leap-frogging over others, he is senior clerk. He too, a matriculate is going to make it to being a Class I Officer. Again not because.

The consequences for efficient administration can be easily imagined. Only two facts need to be added.

These are consequences which have ensued when reservations have been only 22.5 per cent or thereabouts. V.P. Singh is now set to enlarge them to 50, if he has his way to 60 per cent', indeed with his proclaimed eagerness to have reservations for minorities also, to a figure indefinitely higher than even 60 per cent.

Second in most States thus far the quota in promotions has been limited to Classes II, III and IV alone. One can avail of these accelerated channels only upon the starting point of Class I. Mandal prescribes that quotas shall be set aside for promotions "as all levels". And V.P. Singh, Madhu Dandavate etc. have all sworn that Mandal's recommendations will

be implemented "without dilution". Imagine the situation then when posts of Secretaries and Additional Secretaries to Government are packed in this way, and to this extent—as they must inevitably be when the roster is put in operation, when they are packed that is by persons who by definition lack the qualifications necessary for the job.

And to imagine that a Prime Minister and his colleagues have set us on this ruinous course without so much as reading the report, and, on the telling of a Minister like Sharad Yadav himself, it because it is a master-stroke for consolidating some vote bank.

Identification

It is evident that whether one has or not been born into one of the castes which have been able to wrest reservation makes a great deal of difference to one's being able to avail of admissions, of jobs, of jobs at higher levels etc that is of things that are very, very scarce in India.

A great deal therefore, turns on which castes have been recognised as backward enough to merit reservations.

The courts have struck down lists prepared by States on occasion. Mandal himself cites the Supreme Court's key decision on the point in *State of AP, V.P. Sagar* (AIR 1968 SC 1379).

The High Court of Andhra had struck down the list the State government was operating on. The State came to the Supreme Court in appeal. The Supreme Court too declared the list to be without basis and hence invalid. Its observations on the occasion were definite and 'stern—laying down both the high norms such lists must live up to as well as the reason why they must do so.

The observations are indeed worth reading. The observations when contrasted when what contrasted with what prevails even today—i.e, twenty two years after the Supreme Court laid down the law to emphatically—are enough to invalidate the entire paraphernalia of reservations, the entire structure rests after all on lists of castes recognised as backward etc.

Here is what the Supreme Court said in *State of AP v, Sagar* :

“Article 15 guarantees by the first clause a fundamental right of far reaching importance to the public generally. Within certain defined limits an exception has been engrafted upon the guarantee of the freedom in clause (1), **but being in the nature of an exception, the conditions which justify departure must be strictly shown to exist.** When a dispute is raised before a court that a particular law which is inconsistent with the guarantee against discrimination is valid on the plea that it is permitted under Clause (4) of Article 15, **the assertion by the State that the officers of the State had taken into consideration the criteria which has been adopted by the courts for determining who the socially and educationally backward classes of the society are, or that the authorities had acted in good faith in determining the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens, would not be sufficient to sustain the validity of the claim.** The courts of the country are invested with the power to determine the validity of the law which infringes the fundamental rights of citizens and others and when a question arises whether a law which prima facie infringes a guaranteed fundamental right is within an exception the validity of that law has to be determined by the courts on materials placed before them, But merely asserting that law was made after full consideration of the relevant evidence and criteria which have a bearing thereon, and was within the exception, the jurisdiction of the Courts to determine whether by making the law a fundamental right has been infringed is not excluded.

“The High Court has repeatedly observed in the course of their judgement that no materials at all were placed on the record to enable them to decide whether the Criteria laid down by this Court for determining that the list prepared by the Government conformed to the requirements of Clause (4) of Article 15 were followed. On behalf of the State it was merely asserted that an enquiry was in fact made with the aid of expert officers and the Law Secretary and the question was examined from all points of view by the officers of the State. By the Cabinet sub-committee and by the Cabinet. But whether in that examination the correct criteria were applied is not a matter on which any assumption could be made especially when the list prepared is ex facie based on castes or communities and is

substantially the list which was struck down by the High Court in P.S.U. Hadev's case 1966-I and H.W.R. 294. Honesty of purpose of those who prepared and published the list was not and is not challenged but the validity of a law which apparently infringes the fundamental rights of citizens cannot be upheld merely because the law maker was satisfied that what he did was right or that he believes that he acted in a manner consistent which the Constitutional guarantees of the citizen. The test of the validity of law alleged to infringe the fundamental rights of citizen or any act done in execution of that law lies not in the belief of the maker of the law or of the person executing the law, but in the demonstration by evidence and argument before the courts that the guaranteed right is not infringed".

We have already seen that this enunciation which of course he cites in full, had not the slightest effect on Mandal.

*He incorporated wholesale lists that were in States which, as we have seen earlier, on his own telling had little basis.

*He ordered an enormous survey. Professor BBM. Roy-Burman who headed the team has revealed to *Indian Express*, (August 31, 1990) that each of the suggestions of the experts was ignored that instead of 151 tables suggested by them being used, 31 were used that the data collected were concealed from the experts that while experts had concluded that occupation was a better criteria of backwardness, or at best a blend of occupation and caste, Mandal plummeted for caste. Above that the tampering commenced precisely after a pilot survey in West Bengal showed that only two occupational groups—blacksmiths and potters—could properly be regarded as "backward", that the weights arrived at by the experts for the different criteria were arbitrarily dumped and another set fabricated, that the Commission has inflated its estimate of the proportion that backwards are of the population by imaginative triple counting and so on.

*Mandal has himself recorded that the survey the Commission conducted, by excluding the experts it now turns out, yielded incredible results, and that therefore the Commission modified them using its own "intimate personal

knowledge"—of course he does not disclose in how many cases and to what extent the results were thus modified.

The results are therefore, of indeterminate worth. In his Prime Minister, Mr. Biju Patnaik has pointed to some laughable aspects of the statistics Mandal furnishes in the case of Orissa. Twenty-old castes which he has listed as being "other backward castes" are in fact already recognised as scheduled castes! are in fact already recognised as scheduled. castes! The Commission lists as caste entities which are just surnames, and surnames at that which are used by high caste persons too! some castes" he lists are untraceable in Orissa.

The West Bengal government too has said that it is not able to even trace some of the "castes" the Commission has listed.

In the cases of UP, Bihar etc. we have seen earlier that the Commission has listed "backward" castes which are in fact dominant, and domineering.

That is as far as his report goes.

The decade since

Mandal submitted his report a decade ago. Has the situation changed in the intervening ten years? Is the list in use in your State based on some systematic survey, asked my colleagues. They contacted the authorities. Here are the answers they received :

***Andhra** : No survey in the strict sense has been conducted. Castes have been identified on the basis of the report submitted by a committee headed by N. Anantaraman in June 1970, that is twenty years ago.

***Assam** : Of all things Mandal's list has been adopted, plus the results of "some sort of rough survey". In this survey "geographical remoteness, food habits, living patterns, economic standard and educational status" were used as criteria "but they were followed very loosely."

***Bihar** : Castes have been added to the list periodically. It is said that apart from other things the Government has for this purpose used results of the work of two research institutions in the State.

***Goa** : A survey was the basis of identifying scheduled

castes no survey was undertaken for identifying other backward castes, instead castes were recognised as backward "on the basis of projections made by OBC leaders".

***Gujarat :** A mixture of "claims and suggestions" and the results of a survey conducted by the Baxi Committee in 1982-86 i.e., about fifteen years ago.

***Haryana :** No survey was ever carried out to determine who constitute the OBCs, nor are there any definite criteria or guidelines to determine backwardness. Officers affirm that castes are recognised as backward "on the suggestions or recommendations of politicians and leaders."

***Jammu and Kashmir:** Surveys are said to have been done. In the troubled conditions at this time it is not possible to verify their worth etc.

***Karnataka :** It is the one State in which a comprehensive survey is said to have been done. But see below for what happened to major entries in it.

***Kerala :** The list was prepared by the Nettoor Commission years ago. It was not based on any comprehensive survey. "Information provided by heads of departments and institutions was used a few random sample surveys in villages and towns were used...scanty police records and newspaper reports of untouchability served to determine historically backward classes..." reports may colleague.

***Madhya Pradesh :** No organised survey guidelines for identification of a caste as backwards are also vague. Educational and social criteria are said to have been used "which the present set of bureaucrats is not able to elaborate".

***Maharashtra :** No comprehensive survey ! List in use originated primarily from the recommendations of a committee headed by an MLA which submitted its report in November 1961, i.e. almost thirty years ago.

***Orissa :** As the Chief Minister has stated, the State has no list of OBCs at all.

***Punjab ;** Periodic surveys of indeterminate thoroughness and comparability are said to be the basis.

***Rajasthan :** No survey has been made to identify OBCs,

and the concerned departments of the State government do not have any list of OBCs to operate from.

***West Bengal** : The State government does not seem to have any information about identifying OBCs.

***Tamil Nadu** : From British days castes have from time to time been recognised as backward on the basis of petitions and departmental assessments. No surveys were done, the fate of the enumeration commission which was set up in January 1988 is noted below.

***Uttar Pradesh** : No survey, Instead recommendations of the Chedilal Sathi Committee which reported in 1975 and of all things the Mandal Commission seem to be the main sources for the list.

Thus, apart from Karnataka and two or three other States hardly a survey to speak of, *ad hoc* additions. A host of criteria, varying from committee to committee, from State to State, and these combined with varying, in most cases unknown weightages.

The Real determinant

And supervening over all these, music power.

The Havanur Commission removes Lingayats from the list of backward classes in Karnataka. The Venkataswamy Commission removes the Vokkaligas too. Violence follows. The Government restores both to the list.

In September, 1987, the Vanniyar Sangham in Tamil Nadu claims that 65 lakh Venniyars in the State constitute a fifth of the State's population, and therefore deserve an exclusive reservation of 20 per cent. It launches a violent agitation. This triggers off a fresh wave of demands from other caste-based organisations, and during his last days MGR holds discussions, more accurately these are held on his behalf with about 100 of them. The process of examining their demands comes to nought as the population figures projected by each of them, when added up, far exceed the total population of the State !

In January, 1988 the State comes under President's rule. After discussions with the Vanniyar Sangham, both at the Central and State level, the Tamil Nadu government accepts

in principle the need for exclusive reservations for the most backward castes, including the Vanniyars as distinct from backward castes in general. An enumeration commission headed by P.V. Venkatakrisnan is set up to conduct a census of the most backward castes, including the Vanniyars. The latter are not assuaged and demand an interim reservation for themselves. Karunanidhi comes to power in 1989, and announces in the Assembly that he has wound up the enumeration commission so as to decide the issue at the earliest as the Vanniyars have given him an "ultimatum" in this regard. On March 31, 1989, he announced 20 per cent reservation for the most backward castes, including the Vanniyars. Karunanidhi's caste is naturally among the most backward castes.

This is the manner in which additions and deletions to the list, indeed reservations themselves have been wrested.

Such is the appalling basis of Mandal's list Such that of the State lists.

And V.P. Singh, in announcing that whichever caste is in Mandal's list and a State list, will be entitled to the new reservations has embraced both.

He commitment, he says.

Courtesy : *Indian Express*.

Reservation and Development

BIPAN CHANDRA

The long-term and far-reaching damage that the reservation principle would inflict on Indian economy in the present world setting is being missed by both 'reservationists' and anti-reservationists'.

India has been trying hard for the last 40 years to overcome the historical backwardness bequeathed to it by 200 years of colonialism. But wherein lay the basic colonial or peripheral character of India's backwardness? And what are the basic processes and policies through which this backwardness is to be overcome? How is the transition from a peripheral to an independent, developing economy possible?

According to the 19th and 20th century Indian critics of colonialism, the basic aspect of the colonisation or peripheralisation of India, was its reduction to a producer of raw materials and importer of manufactures. This meant that India as a periphery of the world economy was assigned a specific role in the international division of labour. It was to produce low-technology, low-productivity, low-wage and low-profit items while the developed or core countries were to produce high-technology, high-productivity high-wage and high-profit commodities. This international division of labour inevitably led to an unequal relation between

India and other colonies and peripheral countries on one side and the developed, core countries on the other and to the inevitable under-development of the former.

Colonial character

The peripherality or the colonial character of an economy relates to the unequal character of its relation with the core economics and not to the production of any particular products. This inequality is basic, but the type of products through which it manifests have no fixity—they undergo continuous change.

What has happened in India in the last 200 years? The First Industrial Revolution was based on revolution in agriculture and on basically artisanal innovations in textile production and Watt's steam engine and few other products. We missed this revolution. The Second Industrial Revolution during the first half of the 19th century was based on capital goods industry, it saw the development of machines to manufacture machines and locomotives. We failed to be a part of this change.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, science was joined with technology. The result was that steel, the internal combustion engine, electricity, and petroleum became the engines of economic growth. These engines of growth played little role in Indian economy. Petrochemicals, electronics and nuclear energy developed after the First World War. Throughout these four phases India went on falling behind as the technological gap between it and the core, capitalist countries went on widening.

The entire-post-independence development strategy in India was aimed at reducing this technological gap by simultaneously compressing the Second, Third and Fourth Industrial Revolutions and thus structurally transforming Indian economy. The strategy was to rapidly raise the technological and productivity levels of Indian agriculture and industry to those of the most advanced sectors of world capitalist economy and not merely to increase production on the basis of existing, low-level techniques.

Major reversal

We have achieved a certain success in this. Indian industry has grown physically as well as undergone basic structural transformation. Industrial production is today ten times that in 1951. A major reversal has occurred in terms of the growth of basic goods and capital goods' share in total industrial production. Between 1956 and 1980 the share of basic goods and capital goods has gone up from 22.13 per cent and 4.71 per cent to 39.42 per cent and 16.43 per cent respectively. Similarly there has been a more or less satisfactory agricultural growth—2.54 per cent per year from 1950 to 1984 and nearly 3.5 per cent per year from 1985 to 1989.

We have, however, failed to catch up with the advanced countries of the world. While we have been trying to catch up, these have entered another phase of industrial revolution resulting in our growing technological dependence on the core countries.

In fact, we have entered a new momentous phase in human economic history. Science is today so transforming the world that the traditional distinction between core and peripheral activities is becoming irrelevant. In simple terms, the thrust areas of world economy today are those of the microchip, biotechnology and new sources of energy. In more scientific terms, the current phase of development is, to quote Andre Gunder Frank, "the production of technology by technology, of the production, of productive techniques."

The situation is even more clearly delineated by Arrighi and Drangal. The advanced the core part of the world increasingly controls "strategic decision-making, control and administration, research and development." Thus it tends to become the locus of the "brain activities of corporate capital." Activities of pure execution, including production of consumer and producers' goods, are shared with the rest of the world. The peripheral countries euphemistically described as the Third World—are expected "to become the locus of the 'muscle and nerves' activities". Moreover, it is not only science and technology which are involved. In the new core activities,

control and administration, strategic economic decision-making, and service sector activities are no less important.

In the world today, 'brain power' is emerging as the crucial factor in development. To some extent this has been so ever since science was married to technology in the last quarter of the 19th century. Development of education, both lower and higher, was the major factor in Germany's leap over Britain at the end of the 19th century. The Japanese and Korean 'miracles' in the last 20-30 years have been based on massive efforts to develop the 'brain power of their societies. The Swedes assign their economic break through in the first half of the 20th century to a few 'lucky' inventions which gave them an edge in a few products on a world scale. On the other hand, the Chinese now fully acknowledge that the Cultural Revolution by attacking and undermining China's brain power set back China by two decades or more. And, of course, Nazi Germany paid heavily for its policy of attacking Jews and expelling and exterminating them for the crime of having occupied too large a part of the field in professions, academics, politics and economy. If nothing else, they lost the race for mastering atomic power.

Brain power

To cope with new economic situation, develop our economy, and give a reasonable standard of living to our people, it is necessary to make institutional and organisational changes in our economy and society. We can debate the character of these changes and hold divergent views. But one thing is clear. Whatever the nature of social and economic structures and institutions, the 'brain power' and 'brain activity' will be crucial to their success. Nothing can be achieved without them.

And it is precisely at 'brain power' that the policy of reservations strikes, thus pushing us back into the colonial-type or peripheral underdevelopment. At one blow, in the name of equity and the righting of historical wrongs, it sets us back instead of pulling us forward. This it does in several ways. It will openly keep sections of existing 'brainpower' out of the needed place. It marginalises the 'achievers' and 'developers'.

It demoralises those who want to develop their 'brain power' and instead glorifies 'muscle and nerves' activities. It openly proclaims that the power to make decisions is to be put in the hands of those who are far less qualified than others to exercise it. Can there be a better recipe for economic disaster and for achievement' of underdevelopment' ?

Besides, for various reasons, India has already suffered from large scale brain drain to the United State and Europe. More than foreign and NRI capital, we need the presence of the carriers of this brain power inside India. Thoughtful Indians have been trying to find ways and means of checking and reserving the brain drain. Reservation policy will not only nullify all these efforts but will surely push—one might even say expel—many more from the country.

Wider education

Of course, India also suffers from massive 'internal brain drain'. For various institutional and structural reasons, including those pertaining to class and caste, Indian brain power is at present drawn from a from small percentage—say 10 per cent of the population. The potential power of crores is not utilised and is, in fact, suppressed.

Crucial in this respect is the role of the present system of education. The need for wider education is accepted by all. But there is an equal, if not greater, need for improving the quality of education. It is at the school stage that most often the spark is extinguished. And it is also, above all, this stage that measures to supplement education should be taken to upgrade it in the case of the socially, economically and educationally backward sections. The urban, upper and middle class children, of all castes, are better educated because of the educational environment in the family. In the case of the poor and the deprived, of all castes, it is the absence of this environment, along with economic constraints, and not any conspiracy by the 'forward' castes, that is responsible for educational backwardness and the consequent inability to compete for jobs in the public and private sectors. Not reservations but better and special facilities in the form of scholarships, residential schools, supplementary

education, and better use of television and video and other media are the real answer in the short run. The long-run answer is of the course a more equitable and just and democratic social order and not the congealing of one of the worst features of Indian civilisation.

Courtesy : *Indian Express*.

Through the Prism of Clerkdom

VEENA DAS
 AYESHA KAGAL

As a child Alu, Amitav Ghosh's protagonist in *The Circle of Reason*, undergoes an arduous apprenticeship with Shombhu Debnath, a brilliant, is somewhat eccentric *jamdani* weaver.

'This is *real* work', Shombhu's daughter hisses at Alu, watching him hopelessly entangled in yards of yarn. "You'll never be able to do it. Go back to your school and books".

But Alu persists with the painstaking, backbreaking work at the loom till rainbows of cloth flow from it and the simple, star-shaped *tara-buti* has evolved into the dazzling pointillism of a hundred thousand diamonds—the *lokhkhohira-buti*.

The world is your challenge now, Shombhu Debnath says to Alu. Look around you and see if your loom can encompass it.

"Alu looked. Bomb-*buti*? Too dull, bottles and scraps and hints of blood. Refugee-*buti*? Too much corrugated iron and leaning tin sheets. Wac-*buti*: Too much chaos, the loom demands order.

Instead, Alu conjured up six yards of majestic howdah'd elephants, trunks curled on villages, lords of the world. Politics-*buti*: nothing more immediate in the world.

Nervously, Alu spread six yards of politics-*buti* in front of Shambhu Debnaths.

Shombhu Debnath's red eyes flamed. He snatched the cloth and ripped it apart...

Filth, he said, filth. He smiled at Alu - not in triumph but sadly. You can never learn *jamdani* because *jamdani* is dead and the world which made it. Beauty doesn't exist ; it is *made* like words or forts, by speakers and listeners, warriors and defenders, weavers and wearers. Stop now. No one can make a thing beautiful on his own, no one would understand him. Only a mad man would try. Stop now, or you'll be nothing but a toy maker, piecing together your politics-*buti*'.

In *The Circle of Reason*, Amitav Ghosh, novelist and anthropologist, sought to reveal the soul of the weaver, to explore his vanishing world, to portray a universe under systematic assault from modern India.

The Mandal Commission Report legitimises and codifies this destruction.

Over half the Indian population, now categorised as OBCs in the Report, has been defined not simply by economic backwardness, but by extreme cultural deprivation. Herded together in this cultural desert are the Vahivanch a Barots, the custodians of mythology in Gujarat and the Bairagis, itinerant minstrels of Madhya Pradesh : the nomadic Gujjars of the Himalayas and the Dhunia weavers in Bihar.

In its ignorance or, more likely, arrogance, the Mandal Commission Report has draped a Brahminical and bureaucratic blanket over 3,743 castes and sub-castes. Covering, in the process, vast sections of the most innovative people in Indian society in the life-sustaining fields of folk theatre and poetry, design and craft, weaving and painting.

There is no recognition of the vital role these groups play as creative repositories of a tradition and civilisation : or as inheritors of a vibrant 'mocking culture' which reversed all that was upheld by the high Brahminical order.

Instead, rescuing these caste from their 'impoverished cultural background', the Mandal Commission Report holds out the promise of a place in today's sun, proffering a slice of the 'national cake of power and prestige' through 27 per cent reservations in educational institutes and government and public sector jobs.

This route, says the Report, lies through 'residential schools' for OBC children which 'will provide a climate specially conducive to serious studies'. Brought up, as they are, 'in a climate of extreme social and cultural deprivation these children lack 'a proper motivation for schooling'.

What or who defines cultural deprivation is ignored. As is the question if lack of motivation is remotely connected to the educational system. 'Educating the backward classes,' says the Report, is the surest way to improve their self-image and raise their social status'.

But, instead of validating multiple self images, which mirror the variation in 52 per cent of the population, the Mandal Commission Report legitimises a single, homogenised one, seen through the prism of clerkdom. Proffering, in the name of progress, a straitjacket which reflects the faith that the bureaucracy is the sole model for organising life, that modern Indian's heroes are only the bureaucrat and the manager.

The question of self-image impinges, inevitably, on the sense of identity. And the personal meaning of caste and community has always varied from the definitions imposed by ethnographers and administrators.

In 1885, Eustace J. Kitts, a British administrator in Ramgarh, UP, wrestled with the subject as he put together *A Compendium of the Castes and Tribes Found in India* compiled from the 1881 census which was designed to lay 'a foundation for further research into the little-known subject of caste.'

'Investigators', Kitts reported, 'have been gravelled not for lack of matter but from its abundance and complexity and', his Occidental irritation showing, 'the lack of all rational arrangement. The subject as a whole,' he declared, has indeed been a mighty maze.

Imposing a 'plan', then, which reflected British notions of 'social space' in India and was part of a discourse on governance, has contributed to much of our modern understanding of caste.

The British, as anthropologist Richard Smith points out, spent years debating whether the unit of social classification should be the house-hold, the village or caste, before arriving

at caste. Influenced by ethnography, a growing discipline in this period which sought to distinguish western and non-western societies, they were persuaded that group identity was the basis of identity in non-western societies.

Thus, in the first volume of *Man* in 1901, the journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Ethnographic Survey of India to be conducted in the forthcoming census was advertised. The entire framework of native life in India is made up of groups of this kind (castes and tribes) and the status and conduct of individuals are largely determined by the rules of the group to which they belong.'

Just as the land mass of India could be known by being partitioned into distinct physical spaces, so would society be known—and governed—by being divided into distinct social units.

But determining caste boundaries was no easy task. Indians were seen as unreliable informants because two officials covering the same area would come back with totally different figures. This observation was borne out in independent India. As Kaka Kalelkar asked in the first Backward Classes Report, 'Can census authorities prevent a man from giving his castes according to his own concept? The *sonar* (goldsmith) in Maharashtra may declare his caste simply as Brahmin. The same *sonar* in Assam may declare his caste as Harijan.'

This was because caste did not imply a single identity, but a multiple one: The group one could eat *pucca* food with was not necessarily the group within which one married.

Not that caste was not a unit of social organisation in Indian society. But it was a flexible, fluid unit, which the very process of recording fossilised, imparting it a solidity.

Also, the process of census enumeration was a far from neutral one. In the Kumaon Hills, for instance, while the British retained the distinctions between different sub-castes among the Brahmins and the artisan castes—relevant to them for organising labour—they homogenised caste names for all the story-telling sub-castes, for which they had no use and, therefore, no interest.

Nearly a century later, the Mandal Commission Report upholds that colonial tradition.

Even as the Commission drives a wedge between the public and the private sectors—making the former responsible for dispensing ‘social justice, and the latter for efficiency—it also reflects modern India’s attitude towards the artist, on the one hand, and the artisan on the other. As the artist soars to exalted financial and social heights, the artisan’s position plummets steadily. And the two processes are linked as the functions of beauty and utility—at one time combined in any item produced—now occupy two unrelated slots in society.

Coomaraswamy describes how the western distinction, unlike the Asiatic, between art and craft—with the first having no use and the second no meaning—results in a ‘perverted idealism and amazing insensibility’. Because ‘the artist is one not much less than a prophet, the workman not much more than an animal’.

‘Asia’, he points out, ‘has not relied on the vagaries of genius out on training. Art here is a function of the social order not ambition a hereditary vocation, not a matter of private choice. What the East demands of the artist, as individual, is integrity and piety and, knowlegde and skill, let us say order’.

From these artisan castes then mainly the so-called lower castes stemmed some of the great literary innovations in Indian society. In the poetry of Kabir for instance, the metaphor of weaving is inbuilt as in *jhini jhini bini chadariya*, delicate is the weave of life. Poetry is not something that lies outside people’s lives—it permeates it. Every morning when a weaver sets his loom to catch the first rays of sunlight to begin the ritual weaving, he lives the abstract philosophical ideas of creation in his everyday life and the designs, combination of colours, all tell a story.

The manner, then, in which these hereditary occupational skills are transmitted is through an entire life-experience, not through formal class-room lectures. And the emphasis on verbal communication in modern methods of techning would kill the originality and verve of these artisans. Not to speak of what effect ‘residential schools’ would have.

What such creative communities need is not a few token seats in dingy central offices to work as peons, clerks and even

IAS officers, but opportunities to develop their crafts ; institutions on which their pedagogic practices would provide models for teaching and policies that would not destroy them in the name of modernisation.

There has also existed a vibrant tradition of protest poetry among the so-called backward castes. Like the 'crying songs' composed by the Periyar women of Tamil Nadu, regarded as the lowest in the ritual hierarchy. A Periyar woman, wronged by an upper caste landlord, would go into a forest and loudly sing a song composed by her. These 'crying songs' were never directly addressed to the oppressor ; they used the idiom of a woman, expelled from her father's kingdom, castigating the rules of patriarchy, a metaphor for all injustice, and were supposed to be 'overheard'.

"The purpose of these songs," say, anthropologist Margaret Egnor, "is to convince the listener of the singer's intrinsic worth, and of the fact that she has been wronged." They are not 'factual accounts of events that have occurred but are self-recreations in terms of quasi private or mythical signs and images. Partly the singer sings the songs to herself. She calls herself a lily, a lotus, paddy, fresh green herbs ; she is perfect : she is deserving of protection. But her perfection has brought her harm. She is gold that has been crushed, a lily that has been injured, paddy that has been sold for the price of chaff, "the wasted younger sister."

Roma Chatterji has similarly described the songs composed by Dom women and the French anthropologist Chambard has collected the songs of lower caste women from Madhya Pradesh. All these have highly distinctive styles and play with mythological images. In one song a woman describes how the wind god plays with her sari in the field and she urges her husband's father to avert his gaze. In another, a woman passing through a village ravaged by famine asks the palanquin bearer the name of the hamlet. "Do you not recognise the streets where you played as a child ?" he replies. Mythological heroes become metaphors to talk of the heroes of modern India in yet another song. Nehru is likened to Rama. Rama abandons Sita for reasons of kingship : Nehru violated the

feminine earth through large developmental projects for reasons of state.

This is not to romanticise the plight of these women, but to point out that poverty, patriarchy and a ritually low position did not mean that they had no culture. Nor did it silence their voice. Similarly, *dalit* poetry has a powerful tradition and if we, as a civilisation, have to survive, it is this poetry and music and drama which must transform us.

We do not need to 'reserve' a seat for such poets. Instead, we need to widen our limited notions of literature and language and revitalise our universities by an active inclusion of these genres.

Of all the cultural forms created by the non-Brahminical, and especially the lower castes, it is the 'mocking discourses,' called rituals of reversal by anthropologists, that modern Indians find the most difficult to accept. In these rituals, normal social norms are set aside and the pillars of society and morality—including moralistic gods—are openly mocked. In western literary and artistic traditions blasphemy was a special genre for creating critical poetry and art. In India, folk traditions have performed that function.

The village festival in Tululand, for example, where villages are possessed by several mythological figures was sponsored recently by the local oil presser caste, which has become rich. As a result, both the Brahmin priest, who has to be present in the possession ritual, and a powerful patron of a higher caste refused to attend it. So the oil pressers placed two empty chairs to mark their absence. When the time came for Bante the *deva*, who possesses the dancer, to address the Brahmin through mime, he went up to the empty chairs and, to the great enthusiasm of the crowd, berated them for being so arrogant and lax.

Such mocking was periodic, limited by ritual prescriptions and may be regarded as merely cathartic— not creating a serious challenge to the upper castes. Perhaps it only provided a night time of love when one is looking for a life time of love. Yet it is in such reflexive practices—in the little things, as Nietzsche said—that one may find roots of rebellion.

What has seriously threatened these creative challenges is *not* an intrinsic cultural deprivation of these castes but the growth in atrocities against them, not only by powerful landlords but by agencies of the state like the police; the disappearance of their common lands and forests above all, the increase in the technologies of violence.

If in the name of civilising them, we cut off their relationship to their traditions, their capacity to experiment with the self, and mould them on the image of industrial and bureaucratic discipline that is the signature of our modern fantasies, then we would have simply carried on the colonial task of 'civilising missions' that have proved the most destructive in human history.

Nothing illustrates the triumph of capitalist and bureaucratic norms better than the attitude to nomadism. Nomads came under great suspicion as modern states built their power on new theories of governance; that in order to rule one needed to exercise continuous surveillance over subject populations. To do this it was necessary to know who the subjects were and this was the origin of statistics and census operations. In this world-view, gypsies in the West and nomads in India like the Gujjars and Bakerwals became suspect because they moved from place to place. Since they were either hostile to British interests or were suspected of carrying information in periods of rebellion, many such groups came to be labelled criminal castes.

In fact, groups like the Gujjars lived in their villages for part of the year and travelled with their herds during other months. Their routes were traditionally fixed and they had customary rights in settled villages where, in exchange for goods like meat, wool and milk, they were allowed to use pasture lands. It is the erosion of pasture lands today that have led to many conflicts between settled agriculturists and nomadic groups. But to assume that nomadism is a cause of crime is to hopelessly mix up issues.

As one passes through life, resting a little on this earth, perhaps what one needs in order to survive is not the world view of people who want to *possess* the world, but the vision

of the nomad—'nomadic thought', as the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls it—in which you touch lightly all that comes your way and then let go.

But who would have the humility to listen and learn ?

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

More Harm than Good

DHIRENDRA KUMAR DIXIT

Siddharth (real name withheld), the son of a well-placed Harijan officer wished to do well in life. He appeared for the JEE (joint entrance examination) to gain entry into one of the five seats of excellence—the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology at Delhi, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Bombay and Madras. Siddharth was a bright boy, but could not make it even as a 'reserved' candidate.

He was however, admitted to IIT, Bombay, for a one-year special preparatory course meant for SC/ST students and being offered by all the IITs since 1983, following a government order. A good performance in this 'prep course' would ensure absorption into the coveted B Tech programme the following year.

His preparation and motivation notwithstanding, Siddharth failed to clear the course. Fearing that this failure would jeopardise his future, he tried again. Even with the extra efforts put in by the experienced faculty in charge of the "prep course", Siddharth could go no further. He developed an inferiority complex and the fear of failure made him withdraw into a shell. Somewhere along the line, a demoralised and disgusted Siddharth turned into a drug addict.

This is not an isolated incident. In fact, a scheduled caste student in IIT, Kanpur, was recently reported to have committed suicide. By and large, those who manage to come through the concessionary entry quota, take far too long to pass and the demanding course creates much mental tension for these students. Some drop out mid-way, some are advised by the IIT to leave. Very few possess the necessary qualities to eventually make the grade.

The drop out rate is an alarming 50 per cent among SC/ST students. The human tragedy involved in indiscriminate implementation of the policy of reservation in the IITs is far too poignant, too palpable, beyond empty words or cold statistics. And, what is more, it is an inordinate waste.

This may appear to be a biased argument. But the fact is that bright, socially deprived, first generation, poor SC/ST students who are well-equipped from school itself for the IIT system of education, can be admitted by all means. But there must be no attempt to force the pace or simply try to fill up the quota. The 'prep course', ever since it was foisted on the IITs five years ago, has been a disaster to say the least.

It was in 1973 that the scheme of reservation of seats for SC/ST students in the IITs was implemented for the first time in keeping with the recommendations of the Chandy Committee report. So far, in IIT, Bombay, alone, some 250 students belonging to the reserved category have been admitted. As it happens, for want of suitable applicants, seats earmarked for SC/ST, (15/7.5 per cent) often go abegging and when seats have been completely filled up, the drop out rate has been so high that it has led to diffidence and rejection among the unsuccessful students.

Three studies on the problems of SC/ST students in IIT, Bombay have been made so far. An overview of their recommendation helps to put the reservation conundrum in proper perspective. The first study was undertaken in 1976 and was published in February, 1978. It highlighted the failure of SC/ST students to survive in the highly competitive IIT set-up and the need for additional facilities and extra tutorials so that the drop out rate could be reduced.

The second study was conducted by a committee appointed by the senate of IIT, Bombay, in July, 1976 and was brought

out in November 1977. It recommended that the joint entrance examinations with two-third marks of the last general category candidate on the merit list be treated as the cut-off point for SC/ST entrants and that direct admission resorted to earlier be discontinued as it proved to be counter-productive.

The third study began in April 1982 and was completed in August 1984. One of the important recommendations of this study is that an attempt should be made to train bright SC/ST students for competitive institutions such as the IITs at the school level itself. "Special coaching after entering an IIT overburdens and isolates them," says the study report and adds "it would be advisable to screen SC/ST students at the eighth or ninth standard using Differential Aptitude Test (DAT) and the like".

This latest study also recommends that while admitting SC/ST students into an IIT, economically poor, brilliant SC/ST students should be given preference as the rich SC/ST students have the same background as the rich non-SC/STs and can compete and enter IIT on merit alone.

The third significant recommendation is that all second generation SC/ST learners should be considered ineligible for entry through the reserved quota. This is essential in view of the growing resentment among non-SC/ST students against concessionary entry particularly of SC/ST candidates from upper and middle-classes (i.e. students who are not in need of upliftment).

One more recommendation is worth mentioning here. Those SC/ST students who, after admission to the IITs, cannot fulfil the performance requirements and as a result either leave of their own accord being tired of extended probation or are advised to go by the institute, should be suitably rehabilitated. They should be helped to get into some less demanding vocational stream or other engineering colleges.

There are several 'problem areas' for SC/ST students in the IIT campus which must also be considered. For one thing, they experience severe academic problems. The highly competitive framework of continuous evaluation and relative grading makes the going tough. A weak academic

background and a poor command of the English language aggravate the problem further.

Special classes for SC/ST students and the facility of dropping of certain courses are, no doubt, available. But, SC/ST students complain that these measures only tend to segregate them from the mainstream and create 'social problems'. Once they are identified and labelled SC/ST, they cannot mix freely with others. They also talk of intangible barriers between the teacher and the taught. Some faculty members are even accused of harbouring a discriminatory attitude, though subtly.

According to Professor Viney Kripal, of the department of humanities and social sciences and member of the IIT, Bombay Senate Committee on SC/ST students, "The entire exercise of reservations in IITs raises a number of uncomfortable questions —both about the merit of such a scheme and about our educational system. Reservation as a short-cut to social amelioration has not been successful in the true sense of the term. Additional help given in the post-school period, when the students' habits of study and performance level have already crystallised, is of little help. What is called for is, first, a radical change in our educational policies, so that the benefits of education can reach a large number of SC and ST communities; and second, proper, preparatory training be given to bright SC/ST students in good schools so that they can meet the challenges of institutes of higher learning, particularly those aiming at excellence in science and technology."

The concept of compensatory justice and positive discrimination favouring the SC/ST students from the time of admission has only accentuated the inter-caste animosity and generated adverse sentiments among the upper castes. That the caste-based anomaly exists in our meritocratic institutes like the IITs where only performance-based caste system should prevail is a sad truth. Under the circumstances, in the IIT's the reservation exercise is bound to be failure.

Courtsey : *Independent*.

Divide and Lose

Mandal in Shah Banos's Wake

AMULYA GANGULI

It is perhaps worth noting that as in the case of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi from 1986 onwards, the disenchantment of the media and of a large section of the intelligentsia with Mr V.P. Singh started over a hasty step on a socially divisive issue. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's problems began over the Shah Bano affair when he was seen to be surrendering in unseemly haste to the Muslim fundamentalist lobby. He now claims that it wasn't a surrender, that Mr Arif Mohammed Khan spoke on his own in Parliament, that the party would not have taken a step which was to lead to a loss of votes with a questionable motive.

But that was obviously not how the Congress (I) saw the issue at the time. As Mr Vasant Sathe has recalled, the party lost its nerve in the wake of protests from the bigoted elements in the Muslim community and beat a hasty retreat, no doubt secretly congratulating itself on having been able to save the day in the nick of time. Its attention then was not on the possible loss of Hindu votes, which it probably never anticipated, given the sorry state of the BJP at the time, but on somehow retaining the Muslim vote even in this required a

frontal attack on the judiciary through the medium of Mr Z.A. Ansari. The nervousness about the effect on the Hindu vote came much later and was sought to be corrected through another hasty step which also misfired—the holding of the shilanyas ceremony in Ayodhya on the eve of the general election.

Cheap gimmicks

What such crude efforts to keep on the right side of the recognized vote banks reveal is the strange lack of foresight among ambitious politicians. Mr V. P. Singh is perhaps a little more clever than his bumbling predecessor and is, therefore, unlikely to lose the votes of one group without gaining those of another as Mr Rajiv Gandhi did through his somersaults. But the similarity lies in the way Mr V. P. Singh has exposed himself as a politician who has not only lost his sense of direction as well as awareness of the kind of public expectations which brought him to power, but seemingly has little idea of what can go wrong by taking recourse to such cheap gimmicks.

Mr V.P. Singh's failure is all the more glaring because his decision on the Mandal Commission's report was in sharp contrast to his acknowledged style of functioning with its constant emphasis on the need for evolving a consensus. In pursuing such a line he was apparently guided as much by his inescapable obligation to strike a happy balance between the twin supporters of his coalition on the Left and the Right as by the need to keep his own ramshackle house in order.

So preoccupied was he with this laborious and undramatic method of running the country, and in even accepting verdicts based on agreements which seemingly helped his political opponents, that it appeared that he was unintentionally and not very wisely overemphasizing his good man's image to his own detriment. In fact, his boisterous deputy actually came to believe that real V. P. Singh found it difficult to stand up. At that point of time, the most common complaint against the Prime Minister was that he must stop securing everyone's approval for every little thing and learn to act on his own.

But the problem with adopting one kind of posture, even for tactical reasons, for too long is that it can tempt the person suddenly to abandon it, for no rhyme and reason, and also at the most inopportune moment. The chances of this happening under conditions of pressure are, of course, that much higher.

It goes without saying that the one issue on which there was need for prolonged consultations inside and outside the National Front and for working strenuously towards reaching a consensus was the Mandal Commission's report. There is also much truth in the BJP's observation that a minority government has no right to take such a momentous decision without consulting its allies. The charge holds in spite of the fact that the Janata Dal was committed to implement the recommendations. After all, such commitments about ensuring the autonomy of the electronic media have not prevented the Government from turning All India Radio and Doordarshan into virtual carbon copies of what they were under the previous regime.

In any event, is the timing of the announcement which has given the game away and robbed Mr V. P. Singh of his halo. If, arguably, he had such a deep personal conviction about the upliftment of the backward classes that he did not consider it necessary and worthwhile to opt for the essentially slow consensual approach, which was also likely to dilute the recommendation beyond recognition, he should have been far more vocal about it right from the start and taken the fateful step at the first available opportunity.

Had he done so, the Prime Minister might ultimately have lost the war, but he would certainly have won a few battles. After all not all the arguments are against the pro-reservationists. As a contributor said in *The Independent*, "(the) Brahmins, who form five per cent of the population, have cornered more than 50 per cent of the executive posts in the State and Central bureaucracy. On the other hand, the OBCs, who constitute 52 per cent of our people, have remained so backward that these castes have not been able to produce even one Supreme Court Judge".

Casteist approach

The counter to this line of argument obviously is that such an accountant's solution to a complex social problem can only exacerbate the disease if only because a casteist approach towards past injustices will give further impetus to the pernicious caste system itself, thereby nullifying all the efforts that have been made, even if without much success, to eradicate this evil. Obviously, a more sophisticated and imaginative approach than the one conceived of by B. P. Mandal is needed.

It is a telling commentary on the latter's way of looking at things that Mr K.K. Tewary, of all people should have been the one to come out with what is perhaps the best contribution to the entire debate by calling for legislation to abolish the "perverse institution of caste" altogether. Indeed, some of us were under the impression that legally the caste system no longer existed till we were jolted out of our ignorance by Mandal and Mr V.P. Singh.

Credit must also go to Mr Syed Shahabuddin for giving an entirely new dimension to the issue by demanding "universal reservation", which will set down quotas for everyone, including the higher castes and the religious minorities. There is logic behind the Insaf Party leader's Gilbertian suggestion, however, for such weird categorization can be the only ultimate goal on the tortuous course prescribed by Mandal.

But that is another matter. So far as the immediate political repercussions or concerned, Mr V.P. Singh's folly lay in choosing to act as a politician rather than a statesman. This was a bad mistake because his entire career—the several resignations, the assertion that high office held no attraction for him, etc.—was based on trying to project himself as a man which a sense of mission. This was his sole asset in the last general election and also in the Assembly contests when the dectiorate was willing to overlook his failure to keep out criminals from the Janata Dal list because he at least had the courage to ask the people not to vote for them.

Opponents' body

This was the reason why his public meetings were always a success because there were no dissenting voices against him. No one thought he had something to hide or was insensitive or simply inefficient, as they did about his predecessor. But the honeymoon is over, Mr V.P. Singh has now acquired a formidable body of opponents who will lose not opportunity to show him up as a run-of-the mill politician who is not averse to playing the numbers game without any thought for the uncontrollable forces that he may unleash simply to gain a few extra months in power.

It is a cross he will find hard to bear. And yet, as the various suggestions that are being made to modify the Mandal report show, it would not have been too difficult, provided wide-ranging consultations were held, to evolve a formula that could have more or less satisfied all the sides, softened the harsh contours of the report and perhaps even given a new orientation to the entire reservation system by avoiding the pitfalls that have become apparent over the years, such as the creation of an interest group among politicians in favour of backwardness and the emergence of a new elite among the underprivileged who are no less disdainful of their inferiors as the traditional oppressors.

Perhaps it is still not too late to make use of the opportunity provided by the process of fresh consultations to avoid Mr Rajiv Gandhi's fate when he threw away his chance to give a new direction to communal relations by capitulating to obscurantist elements over the Shah Bano and Salman Rushdie affairs.

But to rectify the mistakes that have already been made, the leadership must demonstrate faith in certain principles – and not act because it is afraid of Mr Devi Lal. What has to be remembered is that India of the more than 3·743 castes and communities expects its leaders to rise above that number and stand for all instead of for curiously named electoral groups. Jagjivan Ram realized this preference towards the end of his

career when he resented being described merely as a Harijan leader, Mr V. P. Singh must remember that his original hero was Shastri and not Ambedkar.

Courtesy : *The Statesman*.

For whom the Mandal quotas toll

India will now become an unending arena of casteist demands and counter-demands, says Ashok Mitra

ASHOK MITRA

The guidelines laid down in Part XVI of our Constitution, 'Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes', were always full of raucous possibilities. These are now coming home to roots ; from Backward Classes to other backward classes is after all only half a hop. Whether what the Mandal Commission had proposed more than a decade ago or what the government has now decided upon is right in principle or in terms of morality is a fatuous question to raise. In a fractured political system, the clout one flaunts is a surrogate for morality. Part-time scribes and unemployed Ph D's can be commandeered to write essays in support of what one has done or intends to do. These essays may or may not go down well ; how does that matter though ? The only relevant consideration is the reality of adult suffrage. In case, by acting in the manner he has, the prime minister thinks that he has fortified his electoral prospects, the rest of the arguments fall by the wayside.

The government's decision has, however, a particular significance : it represents the ultimate triumph of the message of Babasaheb Ambedkar over the preachings of secularists. Caste alignments will from now on receive the pride of place, the aspect of class confrontation recede into the background. The prime minister, in other words, has made up his mind on the kind of battlefield he wishes India henceforth to be. It will be an unending arena of demands and counter-demands, with competitive seeking of reservations in colleges and universities, in English-medium schools, in engineering and medical colleges, in secretarial and ministerial slots, perhaps in trains and airlines too.

The latest crumbs thrown are toward ; the direction of the "economically backward, the prime minister may thus claim some bridge-building between castes and classes as well. In one of his more hyperbolic moments, he has even suggested a quota of seats in Parliament for the poor. Persons once elected to Parliament from this quota will, of course, not stay poor. The suggestion is the refore a bit of a *non sequitur*. The message is still likely to get through: as long as a case can be built, on the basis of some criterion or other, of a section of the citizenry having been discriminated against in the past, it will be entitled to pre-empt for itself some jobs in government. Arrangements of this nature have a habit of catching on. The troubles brewing in Assam suggest that linguistic and ethnic groups too are equally capable of getting into the act, leaning on equally tenable logic. The pattern may soon be repeated in other parts of the country as well. And all this while Punjab and Kashmir with their very special genre of problems, continue to simmer.

Snap judgments, such that the official decision is a knee-jerk response to Chaudhury Devi Lal's threat to encircle New Delhi with droves of disenchanted masses from the countryside, or that the young ones burning buses and pelting stones in the northern states, do not know what they are doing, are therefore somewhat wide of the mark. The underlying issues are far more complex. Ours remains an unequal society ; the privileges are most unevenly distributed. The post-independent polity has failed to do anything much about such national ills as

maldistribution of arable land, near-universal illiteracy and general lack of health and nutritional facilities. For the nation's majority, the oppressive arrangements the system has spawned are little different from what obtained under medieval feudalism. With just one exception medieval tyrants did not have to worry about votes. Modern leaders have to. They cannot therefore ignore pressure groups, who claim to speak on behalf of neglected classes or sections. These groups have to be taken at their face value for they supposedly represent solid vote banks. Revolutions are not next door, but the threat of votes being withheld, or being hawked around to other bidders, works.

Since these are not exactly medicinal days, news spreads that particular pressure groups have been able to swing a government decision in their favour. Other groups then take to the field. These latter have also to be modified through some means or other; they too represent vote banks. The overriding concern is to buy peace—and votes—at whatever cost.

The lament on the part of the left that caste battles will now supplant class struggles will have little purchase; their failure to change society is their failure. The reckless expansion of quotas, it is being said, will lower the quality of administration, and thus prove ruinous for the nation over the long run. But since each and all including political leaders, are dead in the long run, this argument will not impress either. If social tranquility could indeed be ensured through concessions, a loss in administrative efficiency in the immediate period might indeed be regarded as bearable. The danger lies elsewhere. Concessions and counter-concession cannot but lead to a heavy drain on the government's revenues. And there is little point in being coy about it: the need will be increasingly felt to augment the strength of the forces of law and order for quelling civil disturbances that are bound to spread in support of, or against, concessions accorded to this or that group. This will imply further pressure or government funds.

It is the quality of national development which stands the risk of being most severely affected as a result. Determined efforts to take care of the root causes underlying social and

economic inequalities will be difficult to come by. Money will be available for nuclear research and howitzer guns, but not for primary schools nor for free or subsidised distribution of milk and grains for the children of the poor. Effecting changes in rural property relations depends on raising the consciousness of the landless peasantry, which is directly relatable to removal of mass illiteracy. But the crunch on resources will be held out as reason for the nation's inability to undertake and complete thorough, timebound mass literacy or nutrition programmes.

This is precisely where the puzzle lies. Those fighting for job reservations for various backward classes do not show quite the same enthusiasm for mobilising crowds. We have ministers who, by the manner they have gone about, have deservedly earned the sobriquet of generals of the job quotas brigade. Cannot some of them be provided with ample funds and formally charged with the responsibility of bringing down the level of mass illiteracy from the current level of more than 50 per cent to, say, around 25 per cent in the course of the next five years? Why should they not find such an assignment glamorous enough, or challenging enough?

Such issues cannot be altogether swept aside. The government has taken a particular plunge, but the raucousness its decision has given rise to is unlikely to dissolve on its own. With close to 4 crore of aspirants registered with the employment exchanges, and the availability of jobs with the organised private sector actually showing a contracting trend, competition for government employment will continue to be intense. Quotas will cut into the job opportunities for those who may otherwise be qualified for public sector appointments, but who do not belong to any category of backward classes. A government which has opted for a policy of reservations must in the present circumstances be extra careful about the repercussions of other measures it may choose to pursue. For example, an industrial policy which stresses *a la mode* privatisation, killing off the prospect of expanding employment opportunities in public undertakings could further stoke the anger of young agitators belonging to non-backward classes. Should the West Asian crisis lead to both a dramatic drop in

remittances and a sharp rise in the outgo of foreign exchange because of the compulsion to import oil, irrespective of cost, the crisis on the employment front might aggravate. One is not too sure these calculations are overly exercising the government. Nor is there much evidence of any awareness that confirmation of privileges from the top should also be accompanied by an acceleration of struggles from below for establishing rights which are currently the gift of the government. Were things to take an untoward turn, who knows, a prime minister and his ministers may therefore be caught napping even in the very short run.

Courtsey : *Independent*.

Reformist State in Crisis

Impact of V. P. Singh's Latest Blow

PRAFUL BIDWAI

A strange notion is gaining ground among many participants in the debate—if a scanty and not always-very-rational discussion can be called that—which is in progress on the Mandal Commission. This is the notion that the partial acceptance by Mr V. P. Singh of the commission's recommendations is, as it were, a "natural", if not inevitable, phenomenon; that it is no more than a reflection in politics of what already exists in society; and, at the very least, that Mr Singh should be condoned because he has only codified at the level of the Centre what is already a reality in the states and in Indian society in general—reality defined above all by the ascendancy of the so-called OBCs.

There are two aspects to this proposition ; first the argument that the best method of bringing about social justice and progress today must involve the reservation of jobs for certain—in this instance, the intermediate and steadily rising—castes ; and second, the view that the state must reflect processes and tends at work in society ; indeed, that it is

perfectly legitimate for the state, especially a democratic state, to mirror society in this manner.

The first view is itself an acknowledgement of the failure of what may be variously termed as the "Indian experiment", "independent", India's greatest project, and the rationale of much developmental planning in this country. For it is nothing short of tragic that 43 years of independence have not contributed significantly to creating the equality of opportunity, and that we must think of such extreme measures as reserving jobs for certain castes, even while it is clear that such reservations contribute to greater *inequality* of opportunity.

Appropriate Action

And it is even more unfortunate that the choice should not be between forms of appropriate action to promote the interests of certain underprivileged groups, but between the strongest possible form of reverse discrimination (reservation of jobs according to the group's proportion in the population), or none at all. The extreme nature of the option excludes all discussion on the most effective manner of helping the under-privileged overcome their handicap.

The second part of the proposition, about state-as-mirror, is even more questionable, because it has been invoked to condone actions of doubtful validity on the part of the state on such major issues as Sati, Ram Janambhoomi and the Muslim Women's Bill, besides Mandal. In reality, the modern state does not, indeed cannot, mirror society. It is constructed so as not to do so. Its very foundations, constitutive principles and structures are such as would set it apart from, if not place it over, society. A does its function ; to organise and regulate society, which it can only do by towering over differences within society, and by standing above all currents and trends at work in it.

The very form of the modern stage compels it to define itself in contrast to civil society. The sharply different categories of bourgeois and proletarian peasant and landlord, in the latter are all reduced to the formal, uniform notion of citizen in the realm of the state. Equality before the law, a law abstracted

from the concrete realities of civil society, is a constitutive principle of the state. The "reality" of what goes on in society does not find a translation in the sphere of the state—indeed the state may not even take cognisance of it—except when expressed in terms dictated by the latter.

The supremacy of the state is legitimised above all in an abstract, impersonal jurisprudence which bars all individuals and groups from exercising anything approximating the sovereign power that is the exclusive preserve of the state. The state has to defend, define and enforce public morality. It must promote specific values and ideas while delegitimising others. It has to educate society, it is, in this sense too, the latter's master.

Aggressive role

Unpalatable as it might be in some respects, such a state is the reality. There is no alternative to it today. Indeed, in the large, less industrialised, highly heterogeneous countries, the state must play an even more aggressive "leading" role vis-a-vis society, not least because it is the only institution which has a universal, homogeneous and cohering character.

In this garb, the state is the essence of the "prince". It is its preserver, guardian and protector. It guides society comprehensively. In the absence of other institutions, it is the repository of culture and values, the "commonsense" forward, to modernise, desegregate and secularise it, to reconstitute it after its own image. In other words, it is a reformist state.

There can be little doubt that the state India became on independence was designed to be precisely that, shaped as it was by the 150-year-long movement for social reform, by the ideas of the freedom struggle and the aspiration to build a forward-looking, open, egalitarian, flourishing society freed from parochialism and prejudice, whether religious, ethnic, linguistic or casteist.

There is thus a long line of continuity between the abolition of Sati and the five-year plans, between the introduction of the railways and the constituent assembly, between the slogan of Swaraj and the reorganisation of the states, or if you like, between Bentinck and Nehru, between Ram Mohan Roy and

Shahu Maharaj, between Ranade and Gandhi, between Phule and Ambedkar.

It is not an accident that the Indian state has taken initiatives that go well beyond the limited role of furnishing conditions for the reproduction of society, or maintaining order. It is, for instance, unlikely that we would have more than scrappy, museum-worthy vestiges of the classical and folk music and dance traditions, more than a handful of archaeological monuments, or even a 35 to 40 per cent literacy rate without state initiative, not to speak of progressive contraception laws, women's education, special child care schemes, famine control programmes, secular or anti-communal literature in school curricula, or some good cinema.

Periodical attacks

The reformist character of the Indian state is not a 'contingent factor attributable to a particular leadership. It is dictated by the imperative of survival in a fragmented environment above which the state must rise if only to protect itself. The Indian state is reformist of nothing : it could not hold together a heterogeneous society which is already placed in a powerful centrifuge.

The reformist state has its enemies. It has been progressively undermined and periodically attacked from within and without by those who reject its universalist, homogenising character, question its secular legitimacy or are ready to dissolve it into society under pressure from chauvinistic, revanchist, atavistic, retrograde parochial movements. Mrs Gandhi's handling of the Punjab situation in the early eighties, the retreat beaten by Mr Rajiv Gandhi on the Shah Bano case and his failure to act on Roop Kanwar's *chunri* festival, and his dithering last October on the Ayodhya issue, are all instances of such collapse.

Mr V. P. Singh has added his own mite by inflicting Mandal upon a state whose reformist momentum has already been greatly weakened. This development has unclashed a reaction—itsself far from healthy and in some ways blatantly casteist—which now threatens to liquidate the gains of the social reform move-

ment. Even worse, the Ayodhya issue is set to polarise and communalise society as never before. The agitation to demolish the mosque and built a Ram temple there can only be permitted at the cost of undermining not just secularism, but the legitimacy of the reformist state itself.

Courtesy : *Times of India.*

Cornering the Benefits

T.C.A. RAMANUJACHARI

The V.P. Singh Ministry's decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations regarding reservations for Other Backward Classes and the aftermath proves, once again, that emotive issues ever admit of sober debate or rational solution. The instant decision, seen in the proper perspective, is clearly a gambit in the power game being played by a resurgent intermediate class, a major part of which is classified as belonging to "Other "Backward Classes", after having cornered, in the last 40 years, the lion's share of the benefits of compensatory discrimination.

The resentment, anger and bitterness of those classes which are now nominated for deprivation is understandable but is so intense and deep-rooted that there is a present and imminent danger to national unity and solidarity and of social strife. The Prime Minister has committed his first major but irretrievable blunder by opting to perpetuate caste identity and rivalry.

Social debt

True, there is a social debt to be paid. The discharge of this ancient debt might not have been possible if the prohibition in

Article 15(1) of discrimination in matters relating to public employment on the aforesaid grounds, had remained unrelieved by the grant, by Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the discretionary power of compensatory discrimination. This power has, however, been granted as an exception notwithstanding the "judicial discipline" of N.M. Thomas (AIR 1976 SC 490), to the solemn undertaking of Articles 15(1) and (2) and not as a licence to subvert that undertaking.

But the question still remains as to who are entitled to the repayment of the social debt. The reservation policy pursued during the last 40 years has resulted in the accrual of undeserved benefit to those who are less advanced only in relation to the most advanced in the Indian polity but are, even so, classified as Backward and the truly backward classes have been cheated out of the benefits of compensatory discrimination. No one denies that there has been a massive "creaming off of the benefits by the former.

To cite a few examples :

(i) The First Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission found that the Most Backward Classes, 44 per cent of the Backward Classes' population of the state, accounted only for 9.4 per cent of the Backward Class students admitted in 1970 to engineering colleges, 11 per cent of these in medical colleges, 13.9 per cent of these selected for class II Government posts. It also found that the per capita expenditure on scholarships for them was 78 paise compared to Rs. 2.10 for the rest of the Backward Classes. A comparison of the flow of benefits showed that while nine castes (4.3 per cent) of the Backward Classes were prospering under the compensatory discrimination scheme, seven more populous castes (12.1 per cent), all but one of which were classified as most backward, had been short-changed. The picture (table 24 of vol. 1 of the TNBC commission) was:

1. Admission to engineering courses : nine castes 44.3 per cent, seven castes, 1.8 per cent, admission to MBBS: nine castes 47.3 per cent seven castes 0.4 per cent.

2. Candidates in SSLC examination : nine castes 30.3 per cent, seven castes 3.5 per cent.

3. Selection to class II posts by TNPSC in the period of

1964-69 : nine castes 44·0 per cent, seven castes 18 per cent.

4. Gazetted posts held : nine castes 37·3 per cent, seven castes 0·9 per cent.

5. Non-gazetted posts held : nine castes 37·3 per cent, seven castes 1·9 per cent.

6. Per capita expenditure on scholarships : nine castes Rs. 4·63 seven castes 0·78.

(ii) The Second Backward Classes Commission of Tamil Nadu found that in the period 1980-82, 34 out of the 222 communities listed as backward cornered 77 per of the reserved seats in professional courses and 64 per cent of the reserved posts to which the State Public Services Commission made selection.

'All but Brahmins'

(iii) In Karnataka, following the report of the commission under the chairmanship of Sri Leslie C. Miller, Chief Justice of the Chief Court of Mysore, appointed in 1918 the Mysore Government made extensive reservation in 1921 to all backward communities defined as "all but Brahmins". These reservations were in force till 1985 but were struck down following the extension of the "all but Brahmin" formula to the newly-added areas consequent to the reorganisation of the State. Every since, successive Governments have refused to accept the recommendations of the Nagan Gowda Committee (1961), the Havanur (1973) and Venkateswamy (March, 1986) Commission to exclude the Lingayats and the Bhunt section of the Vokkaligas from the list of socially and economically backward classes. A decision is yet to be taken on a similar recommendation of the Chinnappa Reddy Commission (1990).

The result is that the Lingayats and Vokkaligas who are backward only in relation to the most advanced (a criterion that was strongly disapproved in the Balaji case, AIR 1963 S.C. 649 at p. 658) have been undersevedly garnering the benefits of compensatory discrimination. These two communities which accounted in 1988 for only 26·1 per cent of the state population, accounted for 46·9 per cent of MPs elected from the State and 45·6 per cent of the MLAs, 54·4 per cent of MLCs 51·4 per cent of zilla parishad members and 63·2 per

cent of the ZP presidents. The further consequences of this unmerited preference are :

Lingayats : population 15·3 per cent, posts held in class I and II 26·0 per cent, class III 18·0 per cent, class IV 12·1 per cent, access to higher education 15·7 per cent.

Vokkaligas : population 10·8 per cent, posts held in class I and II 14·4 per cent, class III 11·8 per cent, class IV 13·8 per cent, access to higher education 11·6 per cent.

Total of Lingayat and Vokkaliga population 26·1 per cent, posts held in I and II 35 per cent, posts held in class III 29·8 per cent, posts held in class IV 25·9 per cent, access to higher education 27·3 per cent.

Creaming off

Other more and Most Backward Classes 36·6 per cent, posts held in I and II 16·6 per cent, class III 24·7 per cent, class IV 31·7 per cent, access to higher education 18·4 per cent.

Mr V. P. Singh as Prime Minister, therefore, owed a duty to the nation, despite his commitment to the vote-catching promise to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations, to ask the answer to certain questions in the context of the "creaming off" factor as illustrated above. That is assuming that reservations are the best method of repaying the social debt. Some of these are : is it necessary that one undifferentiated reservation should be made in favour of all the communities designated as backward and grant the eligibility for benefits to all of them in one block ? Cannot the more and most backward be nominated for precedence in eligibility for benefits and for prior claim to limited special preferences ? Should not a mechanism for periodic review and revision of the list of beneficiaries and of the nature of preferences be built into the reservation/preference arrangement ? Should there not be a time-limit for the reservation/preference schemes ?

In this context the Supreme Court said in the *Karmachari Sangh* case (AIR 1981 SCP 293). "The success of state action under Article 16 4) consists in the speed with which result-oriented reservation withers away as no longer a need, not in

the ever-widening and everlasting operation of an exception (Article 16(4) if it were a super fundamental right to continue backward all the time.” (p. 306)

Instead of asking and answering these and similar questions, and if in doubt taking advantage of the advisory jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister has opted to become a partisan but not of the most backward. In the process he has destroyed the Government's role as arbiter of conflicts of interest between different sections of the polity.

More distressing, the V. P. Singh Ministry has acted in gross contempt of the constitutional provisions for compensatory discrimination as judicially interpreted. The Supreme Court has ruled: “to politicalise this provision Article 16(4) for communal support and party ends is to subvert the solemn undertaking of Article 16(1), to casteify reservation even beyond the dismal group of backward-most people...is to run a grave constitutional risk (p. 306)”. “Caste, ipso facto, is not class in a secular state”.

It has also said repeatedly from Balaji onward that caste can be a relevant, but not the exclusive, test for compensatory discrimination. It has also been consistent in holding, barring the decision in the N. M. Thomas case, that Article 15(4) and 16(4) are an exception and that the exception cannot render the main provision, Articles 15(1) 16(1) and (2) nugatory or otiose. Therefore, reservations cannot exceed 50 per cent.

Dr Ambedkar, for whom V. P. Singh and his cohorts profess great reverence, also categorically asserted that the seats to be reserved, if the reservation is to be consistent with sub-clause (1) of Article 10, must be confined to a minority of seats (C.A.D. Vol. 177 p. 701-702, Article 16 was Article 10 in the Draft Constitution). The V. P. Singh Ministry has given no evidence to date of its willingness to abide by these limiting principles.

Limit the damage

Are the V.P. Singh Ministry and the State Governments who have made reservations, in gross and contumacious violation of the above two principle, functioning in accordance

with the Constitution? If not, is not the President and the judiciary obliged to ensure that the Constitution as interpreted by the courts is not violated?

But it said that the President is a figurehead. The judiciary, Mr V. P. Singh asserts, confidently, will not come in the way. Then, the only option is that new nominees for deprivation and the already condemned on one side and the resurgent communities falsely masquerading as backward on the other should match their respective strength in the street.

Will Mr V. P. Singh have the sagacity at least to limit the damage in a sensible and rational manner? That can happen only if he resists the temptation to resort to manipulative politics when using reservation as a tool of compensatory discrimination.

Courtesy : *Indian Express*.

China's Alternative to Mandal

S.N. CHOPRA

Scholars have estimated that China lost a full generation worth of development effort through the class struggle to which Mao Zedong condemned his people for a mere ten years. But for this loss, some scholars say, China would have been in the forefront of nations now. The real cost of the caste struggle to which the present political leadership has driven India to will not be known until the end of the century provided, of course, the struggle does not lead to chaos through the virtual disintegration of India.

The backwardness of sections of society in massive demographic entities is not the Indian condition though its correlation to birth—irrespective of ethnicity—is an Indian particularity. In China, the backwards are identified in relation to the remote areas which they inhabit, or the tribal nature of their social organisation. They constitute the racial minorities which account for six per cent of the Chinese population, numbering roughly 63 million people. Since there are no vote banks to be nursed, the grooming of the socially backward in China is not achieved through reservation of jobs in public services or in the party but through

highly subsidised schemes to uplift youth in the backward tribal communities and bring them into the mainstream.

Job reservation

Of the 63 million backward classes in China, more than 11 million are spread over Yunnan province, mostly in the border areas touching Bangladesh, India, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Kunming the provincial capital of Yunnan was a good centre to study China's approach and methods to bring into the mainstream backward sections of its population. Kunming, additionally, had a well-developed Institute of Minorities (there are 12 of these all over China), the principal institutional instrument to deal with the problem of social backwardness. China had, at one stage, toyed with the idea of job reservation which in their set up meant reservation of party posts but had abandoned this approach in favour of the twin-philosophy of assimilation through development and self-liberation a move towards letting them be their own hosts.

The principal formula for the implementation of this twin-concept was to be education and more education at the state's expense and liberalised age qualification for entry into jobs for members of the backward classes. To this was added another interesting concept: the fully educated and arrived tribal must return to the area of his origin for some years, to spread the message of education and social uplift so that more of his kith and kin would gravitate to the Institute of Minorities for upgradation in society through higher education.

I spent a full day at the Kunming institute to see how students from backward classes are brought to the level of forward classes graduates so that the tribals could compete for jobs and promotions on equal terms. The Kunming institute had about 1,500 students on its rolls. All the graduation level, students were offered courses in eight disciplines: history, economics, politics, mathematics, physics, management techniques, Chinese language and minorities language(s). These courses were said to be identical to syllabi for Han or forward classes students but while the Han students in their institutions were expected to graduate in four years, students from the back-

ward classes could take five or even six years to go through the same courses.

Special institutes

In the first flush of egalitarianism, China's policy for mass education was based on the concept of the neighbourhood school for all. Since the backward classes inhabited segregated frontier areas, schooling for their children was not among the most immediate priorities for the government in Beijing. The spread of education in tribal areas was very slow and except for a few communities, the standard of education among the backward classes did not approach the standard in the Han majority areas. The establishment of special institutes for minorities was a step in the redressal of this condition.

The introduction of reforms in China's socio-economic structure—from 1977 onwards—was followed by a new development in the educational system: the establishment of key schools, colleges, institutes and universities for the education of the cream of China's intelligentsia. By 1985 around 80 of such key institutions had been set up all over China, with an enrolment of around 14 lakh students at that time. The scientists, scholar, technicians and management experts from these key institutions were expected to lead China to quadruple its GDP by the end of the century, with a assured per capita income of \$800 per every man, woman and child.

Specific quotas

Since the Chinese approach to integration of the backward classes is through education and not through unmeritorious reservation of jobs, specific quotas were defined for the backward classes for admission to the key institutions even on a lower score in the entrance examination. But once having gained entrance into key intstitutions through privilege, students from the backward classes were expected to attain the standards of excellence reached by Han students, though they may take longer over it.

The backward classes in China are numerically weak but they have an enormous strategic advantage: they occupy

nearly half of China's land area and that too on the frontiers of the republic. These areas are moved by ethnic convulsions now and again, and therefore no government can dismiss their six per cent numerical strength in the total population as having no relevance. True, the backward classes in China do not constitute a vote bank but dissatisfied and volatile they could give regime by Beijing sleepless nights.

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

*Expert's Views
and
Other Views*

Mandal Commission Report & Right to Information

B.K. ROY BURMAN

Under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been recognised as special categories of population requiring protective discrimination and affirmative action to come at par with the rest of the nation. In addition, Article 340 of the Constitution provides for identification of Socially and Educationally Backward Classes who also deserve special supportive action.

In pursuance of the requirements of Article 340 of the Constitution, the President appointed the first Backward Classes Commission on January 29, 1953 with Kakasaheb Kalelkar as its Chairman. The terms of reference of the Commission, as announced in the notification, were: (i) to determine the criteria to be adopted in considering whether any sections of the people in the territory of India (in addition to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes specified by notifications issued under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution)

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should be treated as socially and educationally backward classes; and, in accordance with such criteria, to prepare a list of such classes setting out also their approximate numbers and their territorial distribution; (ii) to investigate the conditions of all such socially and educationally backward classes and the difficulties under which they labour; and to make recommendations.

- (a) as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties or to improve their condition; and
- (b) as to the grants that should be made for the purpose by the Union or any State and the conditions subject to which such grants should be made;
- (ii) to investigate such other matters as the President may hereafter refer to them; (iv) to present to the President a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.

The Kalelkar Commission submitted its report to the President on March 30, 1955. It had formulated the following criteria for identifying the socially and educationally backward classes: (i) low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy of the Hindu society; (ii) lack of general educational advancement among the major sections of a caste or community; (iii) inadequate or no representation in government service; (iv) inadequate representation in the fields of trade, commerce and industry.

It also prepared a list of 2399 backward castes or communities for the entire country and 837 of these were classified as 'most backward'. The Registrar General and the Census Commissioner of India assisted the Commission in making the population projection of 930 backward castes or communities. Here it is to be noted that during the 1951 census apart from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Anglo-Indians, certain classes treated provisionally as 'backward' were enumerated (Census of India 1951, Vol. 1, Part 1A, p. VII fn). The method of enumerating the provisionally backward classes has been recorded by the Superintendent of Census 1951 for West Bengal, (The Census 1951, West Bengal. The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal, p. 1). The Registrar General had

called upon the State Governments to declare which were their 'non-backward' castes. These were not enumerated individually, but the caste community names of those who did not come under this category were recorded, so that their numerical strength could be made available to the Backward Classes Commission as and when it was set up under Article 340 of the Constitution.

For the upliftment of the Backward Classes, the Kalelkar Commission made wide-ranging and comprehensive recommendations. These include extensive land reforms, reorganisation of the village economy, *bhoodan* movement, development of livestock, dairy farming, cattle insurance, bee-keeping, piggery, fisheries, development of rural and cottage industries, rural housing, public health and rural water supply, adult literacy, university education, and so on. In addition, the Commission recommended (i) reservation of 70 per cent seats in all technical and professional institutions for the qualified students of the backward classes; (ii) minimum reservation of vacancies in all government services and local bodies for the Other Backward Classes on the following scale : Class I—25 per cent, Class II—33 $\frac{1}{3}$ per cent, Classes III and IV—40 per cent.

The government laid a copy of the Report together with a Memorandum of Action taken before each House of the Parliament on September 3, 1956 in compliance with Article 340 of the Constitution. It was pointed out in the Memorandum that "if the entire community, barring a few exceptions, has thus to be regarded as backward, the really needy would be swamped by the multitude and hardly receive any special attention or adequate assistance, nor would such dispensation fulfil the condition laid down in Article 340 of the Constitution". In view of the above, the government considered it necessary that "some positive and workable criteria should be devised for the specification of the socially and educationally backward classes . so that deficiencies that have been noticed in the findings of the Commission are made good".

In pursuance of this Memorandum a conference of the representatives of the State Governments took place in 1959, I was at that time in charge of a research institute set up by

the Government of West Bengal. Myself and an other Officer represented West Bengal at that conference. We suggested that occupations, the dependents on which had less than fifty per cent average literacy of the State and also with which substantial numbers of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were associated, could be categorised as educationally and socially backward. With this approach the 1951 census data were retabulated on area sample basis in West Bengal, the then Bombay and Madras. We identified about hundred occupations like rickshaw pullers, construction workers as OBC. But this approach could not make much headway as it appeared that the other States were not much enthusiastic about it. Hence on an all-India basis no list of OBCs or the approach to them could be determined. In the meantime, rapid changes were taking place in the politico-social scenario in India. Through land reforms the intermediary rights between the state and the cultivators were by and large abolished but equitable redistribution of surplus land did not take place in any significant measure.

At the same time technological development in the agricultural sector was taking place in various forms in different parts of the country. A class of rich peasants, who mainly belonged to the intermediate level of castes in the traditional social structure, emerged and deeply entrenched itself in the rural power structure ; it was also making its presence felt in the political process at the regional and national levels. This class was not, however, homogeneous in its composition and different segments of it and not have identical social history. There were continuous shuffling and reshuffling of power equations among the segments. Simultaneously, technological developments were taking place in the non-agricultural sectors, including village industries and various traditional occupations. This in some cases led to marginalisation of the traditional craftsmen and induction of others in these fields ; in some other cases this triggered social mobility movements. Thus, for instance, on analysis of the 1961 census data it was found that hardly ten per cent of the workers belonging to the traditional leather working castes were in leather work ; on the other hand, a good percentage of leather workers belonged to other castes.

But in-depth studies showed that as the occupation was traditionally considered low, others who were inducted into the occupation did not always feel comfortable in the social environment.

It was in this context of socio-political churning that the second Backward Classes Commission was set up on January, 1, 1979. It submitted its Report to the President in December 1980. B.P. Mandal was the Chairman of the Commission.

The terms of reference of the Mandal Commission were not fully identical with those of the Kalelkar Commission, which have already been noted. In case of the Mandal Commission the terms of reference were ; (i) to determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes ; (ii) to recommend steps to be taken for the advancement of the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens so identified ; (iii) to examine the desirability or otherwise of making provisions of the reservation for appointments or posts in favour of such backward classes of citizens which are not adequately represented in public services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of any State ; and (iv) to present to the President a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.

The notification appointing the Commission further stated that "the Commission may also examine the recommendations of the Backward Classes Commission appointed earlier and the considerations which stood in the way of the acceptance of its recommendations by the government."

As regards the flaws of the functioning of the Kalelkar Commission, the Mandal Commission, has alongwith others made the following observation: "The Commission was required to determine the criteria for identifying socially and educationally backward classes and in accordance with such criteria, to prepare a list of such classes. The criteria evolved by the Commission is given in para 1'3 of this chapter...But it is not clear from the Report as to how the lists of backward classes were derived by the application of that criteria...But the fact remains that it broadly adopted the lists of other educationally backward classes prepared by another government agency for an entirely different purpose, and created it as the list of

socially and educationally backward classes of India. This was done without undertaking any field survey to check their validity for the purpose of the Commission". (Part 1, p. 2-3).

The Mandal Commission got a comprehensive field survey done. To that we shall turn later. At this stage we shall examine a particular step undertaken by the Commission, even before the exercise for the planning of the survey commenced.

On April 25, 1979 the Secretary of the Mandal Commission addressed a letter to the Central Government offices for identifying the OBC employees for the both Hindu and non-Hindu communities. After standing that the desired criteria could be evolved only after extensive field surveys and examination of data called for from various agencies, the following tests for identification of the OBCs were suggested on behalf of the Commission :

4. (a) In respect of employees belonging to the Hindu communities :
 - (i) an employee will be deemed to be socially backward if he does not belong to any of the three twice borne (*Dvij*) *Varnas*, that is, he neither a Brahmin nor a Kshatriya nor a Vaisya ;
 - (ii) he will be deemed to be educationally backward if neither his father nor his grandfather had studied beyond the primary level.
- (b) Regarding the non-Hindu communities :
 - (i) an employee will be deemed to be socially backward if either,
 - (1) he is a convert from those Hindu communities which have been defined as socially backward as per para 4 (a) above, or
 - (2) in case he is not such a convert his parental income is below the prevalent poverty line, that is, Rs. 71 per head per month ;
 - (ii) he will be deemed to be educationally backward if neither his father nor his grandfather had studied beyond the primary level.
5. It may please be noted that an employee will qualify for membership of Other Backward Classes only if, both socially and educationally, he is found to be backward according to the above criteria. (Part II, Appendix VII, p 91)

This is an interesting document. Though it says that the criteria of the OBCs were yet to be determined, it shows that the Mandal Commission collected data about the share of the OBCs in services with reference to sections of society whom it defined as OBCs on an ad-hoc basis. It shows that whereas in Class I jobs the share of the SCs/STs was 5.68 per cent, the share of the OBCs was only 4.69, or in all categories of jobs the respective share were 18.72 and 12.55. The implication is that the OBCs are more deprived than even the SCs/STs.

But there is a snag. The Mandal Commission has taken intimate personal knowledge as a valid method of coming to the conclusion. Can anyone with intimate personal knowledge of the social scene in India say that even among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes there would be many persons who are having Class I jobs and whose fathers or grandfathers would not have read upto the primary level? To a lesser extent this will be true for Class II and Class III jobs as well. The ad-hoc manner in which the OBC has been defined for collection of service data would exclude, for statistical purposes, the bulk of the actual service-holders belonging to such castes like Yadav in Bihar, Kayastha (Bengali) in Assam, Sadgope in West Bengal, Satani in Karnataka and so on, who have, however, been included by the Commission in the final list. Hence the statistics furnished in the Report (Appendix VIII, p. 92-95, Part II) have no relation to those whom the Commission has identified as OBCs. These statistics would have validity only if they can be related to those persons of the castes and communities identified as OBCs by the Commission and who satisfy the ad-hoc criteria indicated here.

A second aspect of the criteria is that through at page 4 of the Report the Commission has taken the government to task for giving primacy to economic tests, they have adopted the economic criterion of poverty line for indentifying the OBCs among the non-Hindu communities.

When one finds such lacunae in the Report on the important question of representation of the OBCs in Central Government services, one may be excused if one fail to recognise the Report as scientific' or internally consistent.

For a scientific approach to the task assigned to it, the Commission took several steps. It entrusted the Indian Law Institute to make a documentation of the relevant legislative debates and court cases and analyse the same. Similarly, it entrusted the Tata Institute of Social Sciences to make a study of the social dynamics underlying the adoption of and continuous flux in the policy and coverage of reservation in the educational institutions and services in four States, namely Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Findings

of both the studies, which are of high quality, have been included in Part II of the Report. The Commission also got a massive socio-educational survey done. It set up a Research Planning Team, a Technical Sub-Committee of Experts and a Panel of Experts. Besides, for carrying out the actual survey there was an Advisory Committee presided over by the Director General of the Central Statistical Organisation. I chaired the first two bodies and Prof. M.N. Srinivas was Chairman of the third.

It is beyond my technical competence to comment on how the Commission has made use of the findings of the Indian Law Institute. But I have examined, though not very thoroughly, how the input provided by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences has been used by the Commission. Very appropriately the Commission has given a full chapter (Chapter VIII) to summarise the findings of the Tata Institute. Some of the salient points of the findings could be recapitulated here : (i) In the south the forward communities have been divided either by the classification schemes or politically or both. In Bihar and UP the Government Orders (GOs) have not divided the forward castes. (ii) In the south, clashes between the Scheduled Castes and the backward peasant castes have been rather mild. In the north these cleavages have been much sharper, often resulting in acts of violence. (iii) The traditions of semi-feudalism in UP and Bihar have enabled the forward castes to keep tight control over the smaller backward castes and prevent them from joining the mainstream of backward classes movement. This is not so in the south. (iv) The economics of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have been expanding relatively faster. The private tertiary sector appears to be growing. Also, they are prepared to migrate outside the State. The private tertiary sectors in Bihar and UP are stagnant. The forward caste youths in these two States have to depend heavily on government jobs. Driven to desperation they have reached violently.

But in a different way, in the south the political cynicism reinforced by techno-economic pragmatism has a greater say. In the north, the scenario is very much different. Here we find a confrontation between the politics of obscurantism reinforced by the legacies of semi-feudalism on the one hand,

and the emerging rural entrepreneurs more and more dependent on state-supported technological input on the other. One of the terms of reference of the Mandal Commission being "to recommend steps to be taken for the advancement of the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens" one would have expected the Commission to suggest appropriate measure to put the totality of the social process on the right track, but unlike the Kalekar Commission, the present one has by and large confined its interest within a narrow orbit of reservation in services and educational concessions. One wonders whether the excellent study made by the Tata Institute has been included in the Report for the purpose of embellishment. The Commission would have made a significant contribution had something like the 15 point affirmative programme of action which was adopted by the Government of India in respect of the minorities in 1983, been formulated by it for the OBCs.

Having given the study of Tata Institute a place of honour the Commission has treated it shabbily. Based on a survey conducted by the Karnataka Backward Classes Commission in the seventies, the High Court struck down Balija, Devadiga, Ganiga, Rajput and Satani from the list of OBCs under Article 16(4). The study made by the Tata Institute makes a mention of this. But the Mandal Commission has included all of them in the list of OBCs without giving the supportive data from the survey conducted by it or from any other any source as to why it has transgressed the decision of the High Court.

Now coming to the socio-educational survey, it should first be noted that it was only one of the items suggested by the Research Planning Team. As indicated in Appendix XII, the Team had made several observations at its only meeting held on June 12-14 1979. Some of the salient ones are reproduced here : In the Indian context the task of identifying collectivities with ascribed socially backward status can be achieved from two vantage positions which, however, very frequently tend to overlap. The first is to identify the castes or ethnic groups which are traditionally assigned a low status (other than the Scheduled Castes). The second is to identify the traditional occupation which are assigned a low status but which are also linked with specific castes or ethnic groups. These ethnic

groups may belong to any religion. Once the collectivities are identified in terms of the traditional framework, one is to examine what changes have taken place in their social and educational status under the impact of the various forces in modern society. Thus the Team considered both caste and occupation as the starting point of the inquiry. Some of the members had objected to caste being considered at all as an independent variable. But I was in favour of an open approach mainly because of the following reasons : (i) My attempts in the sixties to codify occupations in the minutest detail for the purpose ranking in the context of rapid changes in technology met with difficulty because precise information was not readily available (ii) During a survey of about 500 villages conducted under my guidance in the sixties I found that there were a number of castes and communities, particularly ex-criminal tribes, who were frequently branded as such by the colonial rulers for political reasons in the nineteenth century and who still bore the stigma of criminality in the eyes of others. Many of them did not have the requisite attributes to be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes and they did not also qualify to be categorised as Scheduled Castes, as they suffered from civil disadvantage, not ritual disability. (iii) My studies in the industrial and mining sectors showed that many occupations were ethnic linked and technological changes frequently affected one group or the other positively or negatively. (iv) The most important factor influencing my thinking in this regard was my experience in West Bengal in the late sixties and early seventies. In late sixties when the United Front Government was formed, the class organisations of the share-croppers and marginal farmers (most of whom were Muslims or Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes, or castes having marginally higher status than of the Scheduled Castes) became very strong. The concerned castes would not speak in terms of caste but class; but the traditional dominant castes like the Sadgops, Kayasthas would speak of the humiliation suffered by them at the hands of the lower castes. With the change in the character of state power in early seventies here was a radical change of the scenario. The erstwhile dominant castes reasserted themselves, they started to speak about the rural-

urban divide. At the same time the class organisations were smashed. The concerned oppressed castes started to operate through revived or newly formed caste or community organisations. But frequently these organisations provided camouflaged platforms for promoting class interests.

In view of all these ground level realities. I felt that caste should also be taken into consideration for identification of the more vulnerable sections of the OBCs so that social engineering for switch over to non-caste collective entities to free the society from the forces of domination and oppression would become possible.

I presented my analysis to the Team and after deliberations spread over two days a two-prong approach was adopted. But at the same time a number of research tools were suggested so as to ensure that caste as such did not become the main criterion for determination of the OBCs. The Team got it recorded as follows : "At the empirical and statistical level the following services and procedures are noted : (i) cross tabulation of occupation data of census ; (ii) village and town studies and craft studies of census, agro-economic research centres and number of other institutions and scholars ; (iii) studies specially conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India on the weaker sections of the population ; (iv) studies sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) ; (v) reports of seminars organised by the Backward Classes Federation and other agencies ; (vi) sample surveys to be specially sponsored by the Backward Classes Commission." Further, the Planning Team observed : "It seems that it will not be possible to go in for a single dimension sample survey ; it will be necessary to make multiprong approaches to gain an insight into the situation in a general way, rather than for identifying the actual conditions prevailing among all the specific collectivities that deserve to be treated as socially and educationally backward classes." The vantage points of the multi-prong approaches have been described in p. 100 of the Mandal Commission's Report which are very much different from what has been adopted by the Commission. They decided to study two medium sized villages and one urban block in 405 districts, thereby reducing not only the size of the sample

but also the contextual diversities of the different types of backwardness. (p. 50). It is also to be noted that the ad-hoc criteria that the Commission had adopted for collection of service data were not brought to the notice of Research Planning Team. One may certainly question the ethics of such action on the part of the Commission. But importantly, had the Planning Team been aware of the ad-hoc criteria it would have suggested additional parameters for testing the validity of these criteria.

The Research Planning Team suggested that the following variables should be taken into consideration for designing the empirical studies: (a) socio-ritual services extended by other ethnic groups ; (b) 'low' status of occupations of the category concerned ; (c) low self-evaluation compared to other ethnic groups in the region (gram panchayat block Taluqa) ; (d) literacy rates in relation to other neighbouring groups in gram panchayat block taluqa ; (e) occupations requiring investment of child labour (upon 15 years) ; (f) representation in public or private sector services or in professions.

An Expert Panel was set up to provide guidance for the follow-up activities suggested by the Research Planning Team. The Panel met at Delhi on July 16-20, 1979. The minutes of discussion of the panel have not been included in the Report of the Commission. Only some stray observations have been included in para 11.5 of the Report (p. 50). It has recently been stated by the ex-Secretary of the Mandal Commission that the Expert Panel was set up only to prepare the design of the socio-educational survey. (*Indian Express*, September 15, 1990) As already indicated, the socio-educational survey was only one of the activities suggested by the Team ; a number of other activities which required expert knowledge was also suggested. Unless there is documentary evidence to show that the scope of the Expert Committee was expressly confined to the preparation of the survey design only, one would be inclined to think that after a lapse of ten years the ex-Secretary is not recollecting the precise facts, Besides it is unthinkable that eminent social scientists (who gave their time free, as a matter of social concern) would have agreed to confine their role to only designing the study and not to see how the results of the

study are interpreted and used. The same holds good for the Technical Sub-Committee of Experts.

As indicated in para 11·4, of the Mandal Commissions Report (p. 50), the Expert Panel after detailed deliberations prepared a complete design of the survey alongwith a set of schedules, dummy tables, instructions. etc. As indicated in para 11·9 of the Report some modifications were made in the schedules designed by the Expert Committee after pre-testing the same. Again as indicated in para 11·13 of the Report, changes were carried out in the instructions for filling the schedules. In para 11·16 (p. 51) it has also been mentioned that only about 20 per cent of the tables which were originally prescribed, were adopted by the Commission. Against the backdrop these information recorded in the Report itself, it is strange to find that the ex-Secretary of the Commission has asserted that not a comma was changed from what the Expert Panel had suggested.

Appendices 14 and 15 in Volume 11 of the Report furnish the schedules finalised by a committee of officials called the Technical Advisory Committee. It is to be considered whether it is ethical to change the schedules, instructions and tabulation designs in the light of the advice given by a body of officials and yet to ascribe the responsibility for the same to the Experts' Panel. As the government has accepted the Mandal Commission's Report, it is presumed that they have with them the schedules, instructions and dummy tables designed by the Panel. The same should be made available to the public.

The Expert's Panel had prepared four sets of schedules for being canvassed during the survey : (i) household schedule (rural) ; (ii) household schedule (urban) ; (iii) village schedule ; (iv) town schedule.

A pilot survey based on the household schedule (rural) and the village schedule was conducted under my guidance in the Bribhum district of West Bengal. I involved the zila parisad in the survey and the data were collected in collaboration with the gram panchayats, the investigators being paid nominal honorarium. As in case of other members of the Expert Panel and the Technical Expert Sub-Committee I gladly gave my time without asking for or receiving any honorarium. But the

actual cost of the pilot survey was borne by the Mandal Commission. Altogether 1200 households were covered. The data were also locally tabulated with both caste and occupation as independent variables. The Mandal Commission's Report in para 11·17 (p. 51) has stated that during tabulation of the survey data caste was also taken as an independent variable, but it has not stated what was the other variable. In the light of the pilot study I felt it necessary to make some changes in the scheduled. I wanted the Expert Panel to be convened but this was not done.

For analysing the data collected during the survey, the Technical Sub-Committee of Experts had suggested a set of criteria. The Committee, however, did not at that stage suggest the weightage to be given to the different criteria. I formulated a set of tentative weights ranking the castes, communities and occupations. In the light of the experience of the pilot survey I wanted the Technical Sub-Committee of Experts also to meet and finalise the tentative formulations. But the Commission again turned down my suggestion. In para 11·18 (p. 51) of the Commission's Report there is a mention of the Sub-Committee of Experts, there is also mention of "a series of meetings and a lot of testing of proposed indicators". There is a reference to the "refinement of indicators" as well. As far as I remember, the Technical Sub-Committee of Experts met only twice.

It is thus obvious that the "refined" indicators which were evolved by the Commission and which have been published in p. 52 of the Report are not the ones which were suggested by the Technical Sub-Committee of Experts.

It is also to be made clear that the Technical Sub-Committee of Experts had prepared the indicators only for interpreting the data collected through the survey. These by themselves did not constitute the whole set of criteria for determination of the Other Backward Classes. As mentioned earlier, even at the early stage of the functioning of the Commission, the Research Planning Team had suggested a number of other variables like occupations requiring child labour, economic levels of castes and communities, representation in public or private sector services or professions. But these do

not find any mention in the list of criteria adopted by the Commission. The list of tables finally adopted by the Commission, as mentioned in Appendix XXI, shows that some data on this line were planned to be processed. If these were actually processed, one wonders why these have not been treated as criteria for the determination of the OBCs. In any case, it is obvious that apart from providing indicators for interpretation of the survey data, the Commission has not suggested the criteria for determination of the Other Backward Classes. It has thus failed to discharge its responsibility in respect of the first task assigned to it according to the term of its appointment.

Failure of the Commission to clearly formulate the criteria for identification of the OBCs has led to absurdities, which become obvious even during a casual glance through the list. For instance the Kayasthas (Bengali) in Assam, the Patnaiks (surname mostly for high caste Karans of Orissa, Bihar, the Rajputs in Karnataka, the Bengalis as a whole in Madhya Pradesh are OBCs according to the Mandal Commission. Besides, had the Mandal Commission acted with a bit more responsibility many of entries could not have been there. The Research Planning Team had suggested that alongwith other sources, the earlier census reports should be carefully scanned to find the social mobility taking place among the various castes. For instance, in West Bengal castes like Sadgope and Mahisya have been included in the list even though they had been recorded as socially advanced in earlier censuses and the literacy of some of them was higher than the state average as early as in 1931. If one goes through the vast literature on social mobility movements that have come up during the last three decades, it will be found that many entries in the Mandal Commission's list are not only undeserving, but are actually harmful for the nation. They would be able to take advantage of the privileges conferred by the government as per the recommendations of the Commission, and further enhance their position in the rural power structure to continue the atrocities on the Scheduled Castes, agricultural labourers and other vulnerable sections of society.

One problem about the list of OBCs prepared by the Mandal Commission is that how many of them have been included in the list and through what source are not indicated. In para 12·7 the main sources that the Commission have drawn upon for preparation of the list have been stated to be as follows : (i) socio-educational field survey ; (ii) Census Report of 1961 ; (iii) personal knowledge gained through extensive touring of the country and receipt of voluminous public evidences; (iv) lists of OBCs notified by the various State Governments. The people have the right to know how many of them have been included in the list through personal knowledge (the quality of which does not appear to be very high from many incongruities in the list such as inclusion in large numbers of the already notified Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes), how many are based on the survey, and how many have been drawn from other sources. The people also have the right to have minimal information of these communities that have found place in the list. The Kalekar Commission had indicated the traditional occupation of most of the communities listed by them. The Mandal Commission could have given occupation and literacy data at least for the communities listed by them on the basis of the survey. In fact they should have made available all the 31 tables supposed to have been prepared by them.

After such incongruous acts of omission and commission, the Mandal Commission has given an estimate of the numerical strength of the OBCs. They have done it through a process of elimination. In para 12·20 it has been stated that the Commission had culled out caste/community-wise population figures from the census records of 1931 and then grouped them into five clusters as follows :

- A. (i) Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (22·5 per cent); (ii) non-Hindu groups (16·16 per cent); (iii) forward Hindu castes and communities (17·58 per cent). [The total of these three clusters is 56·30 per cent. By subtracting this percentage of population, from the total population the approximate percentage of the OBCs is estimated to be 52 divided into two clusters.]
- B. (i) Backward Hindu castes and communities (43·70 per cent); (ii) backward non-Hindu communities (8·40

per cent). [The main snag in this exercise is that after giving the percentages as in the 1931 census for Brahmins, Rajputs, Maratha, Jats, Vaisya-Banias and Kayasthas, they have given a figure of two per cent for the other forward Hindu caste groups. The 1931 census does not have this figure. This is the cumulative figure of the castes which the Commission had considered to be forward. The people have the right to know which are these castes.]

As the government seems to have accepted the estimate of given by the Mandal Commission, it is presumed that they have with them the list of the "other forward Hindu caste groups". This must be made public so that the people can feel assured that some castes, which according to authoritative sources are forward or which through mobility movements during the six decades after 1931 have become forward, have not been left out. If there are such castes and if their percentages to the total forward castes population are added, the percentage of forward Hindu caste groups is likely to go up with corresponding reduction in the percentage of the OBCs.

It is also possible to show that this method of obtaining derived figures adopted by the Mandal Commission, must have embedded in it many elements of subjectivity. But it is not necessary to go into these details.

One can approach the problem of estimation from another angle. In the 1931 census two terms 'depressed castes' and exterior castes' have been used apart from the term primitive tribes'. In the All-India Report, Part I at p. 488 the total figure of depressed castes has been given as 11,12,942 constituting slightly above three per cent of the population of the country. But in Part II of the Report, Table XXVII give the total figure of the exterior castes as 5,01,95,770 constituting about 16 per cent of the total population. The table includes many names which are today Scheduled Castes. Though in p. 471 (Part 1) of the Report the Census Commissioner has mentioned that the term 'exterior caste' has been used as a synonym for 'depressed class', it is difficult to explain the inconsistency unless one assumes that the 1931 census had either done a bad statistical job or had not always treated depressed classes and exterior castes synonymously, notwith-

standing the claims to the contrary. Before coming to any conclusion all the State reports of the 1931 census require to be examined carefully. Besides, the earlier censuses can be examined to locate the names and numerical strength of the communities.

The Superintendent of Census of 1951, West Bengal, has provided particulars of 112 castes of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, whose names occur in earlier censuses, though not in the 1931 census. Many of these find mention in the list of the Mandal Commission. By culling out the figures in respect of them as well as those for whom figures are available in the 1931 census and or those, who were recorded in the 1951 census through a special operation mentioned earlier, minimal information about the numerical strength of most of the OBCs at different periods of time can perhaps be obtained. These can be extrapolated and updated by following the recognised statistical method. The figure thus arrived at can also be compared with the numerical strength of the non-backward communities as a whole, which can be derived from the specially recorded figures of the 1951 census. It is not possible for an individual scholar to carry out all these exercises, but the Mandal Commission could have done so had they wanted to do it.

As the matter stands at present, the estimate of the numerical strength provided by the Mandal Commission cannot be accepted unless supportive information is provided to back it up. On the other hand, as I have been handling the census data for four decades. I shall not be surprised if the numerical strength of the authentic OBCs, who remain socially and educationally backward inspite of the mobility movements of several generations, implementation of the various planned programmes in independent India and changes in social values, turns out to be a small fraction of what the Mandal Commission has estimated.

Many are linking up the flaws in the Report of the Mandal Commission with the question of reservation in educational institutions and in services. Here it should be noted that identification of any category of population as an OBC does not

by itself mean that the persons concerned would be entitled to the benefits of reservation of appointments or posts. In fact, as indicated earlier, one of the terms of reference of the Mandal Commission wants it to recommend steps to be taken for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens. The desirability or otherwise of making provision for the reservation of appointments or posts will have to be first established by them ; only then the question of the extent of reservation comes. What the Commission has done is to discuss in a general way the validity of the principle of reservation by referring to the issue of social justice, merit and privilege and social justice, constitution and law.

As reservation in jobs already exists in favour of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the discussion carried over in two chapters and in another four paras reinforces the validity of states's action in this regard. In recent times eminent persons like Minoo Masani are challenging the principle of reservation and are arguing in favour meritocracy (*Mainstream*, January 6, 1990), but this obviously is an elitist approach. Personally I hold that efficiency should not be considered only in terms of individual's performance, but also in terms of system's efficiency which is more likely to be augmented with broadbased participation of different sections (particularly the subjected sections) of population, even though symbolically, in decision-making and implementing apparatuses. In the specific context of the Mandal Commission, the issue under consideration is whether the OBCs as a whole or some identifiable sections among them are under-represented in public services and posts. The Mandal Commission has not discussed this at all. They have, however, furnished fair statements in Appendix VIII showing the extent of representation of the OBCs in different categories of Central services. As already shown, these statements are out and out misleading and by no means show the full extent of representation of the population they have categorised as OBC.

Apart from the perfunctory data provided for the OBCs as a whole, the Commission has not given any data in this regard in respect of individual castes and communities included in the list. Two facts are to be noted here. One of the

members of the Commission, L.R. Naik, has suggested that the Statewise list of the OBCs should be split into two parts ; one pertaining to the intermediate backward classes and the other to the depressed classes. Under depressed backward classes he has grouped those castes which constitute the most deprived and under-privileged sections of the backward classes. They should be treated as a separate entity for the purpose of benefits and concessions recommended in the Report. The Commission has rejected this suggestion on the ground that according to the Court decision, recognition of categories within the OBCs will be repugnant to Article 15(A) of the Constitution. If this is so, could it not consider the alternative of not including in the list those who are really not the most deprived and underprivileged.

There is another approach mentioned in the study conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. (p. 153). In Karnataka a scheme of reservation prevailed between 1963 and 1977 under which not castes but individuals belonging to certain kinds of occupation as cultivators, artisans, petty business, inferior occupations based on manual labour and earning less than Rs. 1200 per annum were supposed to be eligible for reservation. In February 1977, the government issued orders providing for the following reservations : (i) open competition (42 per cent) (ii) backward communities (20 per cent); (iii) backward castes (10 per cent); (iv) backward tribes (10 per cent) ; (v) special group (five per cent) : (vi) Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 18 (per cent). The special group consists of those persons belonging to self-employed, artisan and other occupations having an income of not more than Rs. 4800 per annum. A criterion of Rs. 8000 was imposed on the backward classes. In the subsequent orders the percentage of reservation earmarked for the special group has been raised to 15 per cent, and the income limit has been raised to Rs. 10,000.

The Mandal Commission would have done a great service to the nation, if after getting these information, it had got their functioning examined in greater detail by drawing upon the survey data sponsored by them and by undertaking supplementary investigations, if necessary. This would also have

helped them in convincingly conveying to the nation whether the provision for reservation of posts in favour of the OBCs would serve any desirable purpose.

As it is, the Mandal Commission has failed to discharge its responsibility in respect of all the terms of reference attached to its appointment. On the other hand, it has made a number of recommendations without giving the requisite data in support of those recommendations. This is in contrast to the Report of the Kalelkar Commission which alongwith others gave tables relating to (i) income, expenditure, indebtedness and literacy of agricultural labour families in some States belonging to backward classes, caste and community-wise ; (ii) statement showing the number and percentage of non-gazetted appointments in superior services held by different communities in several grades in the Mysore State services on March 31, 1952 ; (iii) expenditure in 1952-53 on the SCs, STs and OBCs in the different States. They also gave a number of inset tables. Given the paucity of data in the early fifties, one finds that the Kalelkar Commission showed more respect for the people by making public whatever data it had with them. The same cannot be said about the Mandal Commission, for which paucity of data was not the constraint. The constraint was, as one can see it, lack of sensitivity about the people's right to information. In this context one would not be wrong to move the court to issue a directive to the government to publish all the 31 tables listed by the Commission and make public all the other relevant information.

While as citizens the social scientists should join other citizens in demanding the right to information, they have other responsibilities too. They must see things beyond the Mandal Commission.

One may ask : if the Mandal Commission's approach has been inadequate, what is the alternative ? Personally, I feel that the Karnataka model described earlier should receive closer attention. But the dynamics of shuffling and reshuffling of lists should be understood in terms of some long-term perspective. Does it symbolise a process of back-tracking from the maximal state to the minimal state in the context of stagnation on a much wider canvas in the world order? Or does

it mean something less, something like an alliance of awakened under classes and dispossessed or threatened upper classes against the newly emerged intermediate classes in some territorial enclaves and alliance of emerging intermediate classes and satellite under-classes against the strategically entrenched upper classes in some other territorial enclaves? Does it mean a new pattern of horizontal linkages side-tracking the vertical linkages, or does it mean just the opposite process? Social scientists must address themselves to all these issues so that the needs of affirmative discrimination can be systematically examined and rightly designed.

Demythologising Reservation

AVIJIT PATHAK

Enough has already been said and discussed about the Mandal Commission. While I too intend to participate in this debate, I wish to make two clarifications. First, I would ask the basic question: Is reservation desirable at all? What is politico-existential implication of reservation? And secondly, I would like to examine whether a progressive, egalitarian vision of society can permit the idea of reservation. In other words the technicalities of the Mandal Commission do not fascinate me. I should rather start with the fundamentals—the implications of reservation.

I

To begin with, let me mention the standard arguments that have often been put forward in favour of reservation:

- (a) Reservation is desirable because in an intensely stratified, unequal, oppressive society like ours, the oppressed, the wounded need additional benefits, protective

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discrimination so that they can come forward and participate in major socio-cultural activities like science, politics, education and administration.

- (b) Reservation is also desirable because in a caste-ridden society, a society that, by definition restricts the possibility of occupational and educational mobility, it is the only way through which the lower, inferior castes can alter their prescribed occupations and join those activities that matter in modern times. In other words, reservation is a great momentum ; it breaks the inertia of a static, caste-ridden social order; mobility, openness, democratisation become possible.
- (c) Reservation is desirable for another important reason. It is a great psychological help. The oppressed begin to believe that there is a state, a government that protects them. It is not social Darwinism—the survival of the fittest ! Instead, the government is like a great, benevolent father ! And this security the oppressed need to move forward in life.

As I feel, these arguments, although not altogether irrelevant, are not, however, sufficiently strong. As a matter of fact—and I would argue—it is high time we looked at the latent dysfunctions of reservation. Not to see these dysfunctions—or to pretend that nothing of that sort exists—is to perpetuate an illusion that reservation is really a healthy measure the government has adopted.

II

The manifest, positive functions of reservation are obvious. There is no denying the fact that it has made mobility possible. The untouchables, the lower castes have gained some confidence, that they need to believe that they can alter their destinies and what, at one time, seemed impossible is becoming possible today. Moreover, the continual emphasis on reservation has made the privileged sections conscious of their social responsibility.

It is no longer possible for them to plead for meritocracy.

Because meritocracy is a myth and free competition is impossible in a society where many castes, groups, classes have already been made handicapped. It is no longer possible to speak of 'efficiency'. Because a look at the way modern institutions—bureaucracies, universities, hospitals, industries—function in contemporary India would drive one to conclude that there is no efficiency anywhere. And who run these institutions? Not the Harijans or the untouchables, but the elites who belong to the so-called 'forward' castes! As a matter of fact 'merit' or 'intelligence' or 'efficiency' is just an empty notion. What matters is power. And those who have got the power—economic or political or cultural—have got everything—merit, intelligence, efficiency! But the task is to see its falsity.

Yet, as I assert once again, the manifest, positive functions of reservation should not prevent one from seeing its *latent dysfunctions*. And there are three major dysfunctions.

First, reservation *dislocates* the essential problem. The essential problem is *scarcity*. There are not sufficient jobs, schools, hospitals, industries. Then, reservation for what? If the apple itself is missing, how can you reserve part of it for the hungry? When nothingness is almost a shared experience, reservation does not carry much meaning. Because, even when reservation prevails, the oppressed do not get jobs. There are not sufficient jobs at all. A tiny section of them—a select elite—manages some jobs and perhaps becomes part of the mainstream. But for others the experience remains the same—the experience of nothingness, poverty humiliation. *To provide reservation is not to provide jobs*. Reservation broadly speaking, is nothing. It does not solve the problem. Instead, it remains functional to a faulty political economy and perpetuates an illusion that getting reservation is like getting jobs, privileges, comforts. How absurd!

Secondly, reservation, when perpetuated continually, loses its original meaning, its intended desire to help the oppressed. Instead, its unintended consequence becomes pathological. It robs the oppressed of the confidence they need to stand on their own feet. It becomes an easy, soft solution.

Without reservation they tend to feel that they cannot go ahead. Reservation, far from remaining a necessary positive momentum, gets reduced in an *existential burden*. As a result, reservation becomes another *symbol of impurity and pollution*. The elites among the oppressed get some benefits. They want to perpetuate reservation for their children, grand-children. They become clever. But they seldom realise that reservation is also damaging their self-confidence. The battles they win are never regarded as true victories by the other elites. Reservation does not enhance their self-esteem. They grow up wounded with bundles of complexes—they are angry, yet opportunistic ; highly ambitious, yet unsure about their own abilities.

Thirdly, reservation, because of its ability to perpetuate its own myth, has distorted the consciousness of the oppressed. They want more and more reservation. But reservation cannot and should not be a fundamental right. Because reservation is primarily a piece of charity. Beneath it lies a belief that the weaker sections are not sufficiently intelligent and competent and so they need additional benefits to move forward. Beneath reservation lies a systematic power-equation—the powerful elites are kind enough to think of their less fortunate brothers !

And when reservation continues indefinitely and the oppressed keep demanding more and more reservation (or, more and more charity), they make two mistakes. First, by allowing themselves to be objects of charity they, in fact, intensify the already structured asymmetrical power relations in the society. Secondly, they fail to distinguish a true fundamental right from a piece of charity. They, like everyone else in the society, need jobs, education and all sorts of facilities. That should be their fundamental right and they should fight for it like a rebel with confidence, not like a wounded, crippled being demanding charity from those who, otherwise, exploit, oppress. See the dysfunction of reservation ! A potential rebel gets transformed into a wounded, defeated being believing that without charity, without reservation he cannot progress. A tragic metamorphosis !

These three dysfunctions of reservation—its falsehood, its crippling effect on human personality and the way it distorts political consciousness—need to be seen and accepted, especially at a time when reservation has become a political game and the Machiavellians choose to remain silent about it.

III

Yet despite these dysfunctions, a progressive would continue to argue : there is no escape from reservation, it should exist. Indeed, reservation is a dangerous game. Once you accept it you cannot become free from it. Because the very idea of reservation appears humanistic; not to support reservation, one fears, would give the impression that one is against compassion, justice, one is against the weaker sections. This is the *burden of progressiveness*, its coercion. It is not easy to challenge reservation ! Perfect freedom, perfect equality or the vision of a society where everyone, irrespective of sex, race, caste and class, is equally equipped to start the life-project would always remain utopian and so reservation would always be necessary. Never would emerge a situation in which reservation would be irrelevant !

That's why, the argument goes: No, it is not yet the time to look at the dysfunctions of reservation. The fact is that reservation does help some people and even if new elites are created these elites emerge from the oppressed ! Reservation has not yet exhausted its possibilities.

That is really the burden of progressiveness. The progressives know—and they admit—that reservation is not the best solution, it cannot, be a substitute for authentic, truly egalitarian development. But in the absence of the best solution, reservation emerges as the possible second alternative. So keep supporting the second alternative ; the best solution is never attempted because of the nature of the state, the lack of resources or the class character of the ruling elites.

Why not ? The best solution, given the nature of the state and its structural limitations, is a distant...distant dream. So, for the time being, choose what is possible. And RESERVATION is always possible. It would always be possible. It

requires nothing. You need not give them education. You need not give them food, clothing, shelter. You need not open good schools, hospitals. You need not do anything to rescue them from their morbid, alien existence. You just tell them : 'I have reserved thousands of jobs for you !' But who would take up these jobs ? They don't have education, because you have not given them education—the education that would enable them to become doctors, engineers, professors, civil servants or even community leaders. So keep these posts vacant ! Or you argue : 'Well, even if not all of you, at least, some of you have got some jobs. Their success symbolises your success !' But that is false. Success has its own rationale ; it alienates, separates. The poor Brahmins are alienated from the rich, successful Brahmins. Likewise, the poor backwards remain alienated from the successful backwards. Caste does not necessarily bridge the gap—the gap between success and failure, pride and insult.

The progressives do not want to see it. They do not want to realise that by supporting reservation continually they are becoming increasingly incapable of pressurising the rulers to strive for the best solution : alleviating poverty itself, not a few concessions to the poor ! The irony is that the progressives too get fixated to a false solution. And that's why, they too postpone the great act—fighting the real battle for collective emancipation. Moreover, the rulers too get a wonderful excuse : 'Who can say that reservation is false ? See the Communists, the progressives—everyone is with us. So we cannot be wrong.'

Again, the progressives fail to see the other side of the story. It is no at all difficult to accept that all those who are getting reservation are generally poor, culturally and socially humiliated. But, at the same time, it is difficult to believe that all those who are not getting reservation are necessarily rich, privileged powerful. Because barring a few exceptions, the experience of perpetual insecurity emerging out of continual inflation, lack of proper jobs and career opportunities, is universal. So it is wrong to believe that those who are not getting reservation are necessarily getting all that matters :

good education, lucrative jobs, etc. When almost everyone is insecure, reservation is an additional problem.

The fact is that there is a *common, universal experience* today—the experience that prevails irrespective of one's sex, race and caste. Not to this universal experience is to do injustice to those who are poor and insecure, yet, because of a strange logic of discrimination, are regarded as rich and privileged.

That's why, the growing gap between the demands of the agitationists and the official manifestos of the mainstream political parties. But, then, it is always possible to argue that the agitationists—those who are fighting against the Mandal Commission—are not really committed to the ideal of equality. Essentially, they are casteist; the growing awareness among the backwards frightens them. Their agitation reveals their selfishness, fear and insecurity. And they are so hypocritical that never do they fight for the untouchables—when they are burnt alive, some times by their own caste people and sometimes by those whom Mandal, however, regards as the OBCs! Never do they raise their voice against the capitation fee, a new system of reservation that enables the rich men's spoilt children, despite their stupidity and callousness, to enter the medical and engineering colleges.

All these allegations are true. And it goes to the credit of the progressives that they can see the innate hypocrisy in a movement of the kind that we have been seeing these days. But once again that is only a part, may be a very important part, of the story. The other part is equally important. The students are angry. Not all of them are casteist. Not all of them are hypocritical. There is indeed a social base of their anger. How can the progressive overlook it totally?

IV

True, caste prevails. A man of lower caste, even when he gains sufficient economic status, is often humiliated—socially and culturally. Caste has got its relative autonomy. There is no escape. Yet, the challenge is how to accept this reality and then transcend it. The challenge is hardly accepted. The

rulers accept the reality of caste, but, instead of transcending it, they legitimise, it, intensify it. And today caste has once again become important.

The government seems absolutely unwilling to accept any other identity than caste. This is, in a way, a *systematic repression of other identities*—the identities that could have fought one's caste identity. To accept the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, it goes without saying, is to intensify one's caste identity. The government, ironically enough, stimulates a peculiar rationalisation: 'I get reservation or I manage to get a job because I am from this or that caste'. Or 'I don't get a job because I happen to be born in a different caste.' Rationalisations—undoubtedly, these are rationalisations. The fact is that, reservation or no reservation, there is no escape from unemployment. Because there are not sufficient jobs at all. But then, the Government does nothing to alter this false consciousness. Caste shapes one's destiny. The government asserts it once again. And the progressives, it seems, are not very critical about it.

What a paradox! where is the dream—the dream of a society in which everyone is a free citizen growing, evolving and embracing a universal identity! Why are not the progressives realising that reservation and its growing expansion without even the slightest critical note and reflection are killing all our sacred dreams?

V

Perhaps they fear that not to support reservation is to support social Darwinism! But then this fear is an *irrational fear*. One is against reservation not because one is against the oppressed and weaker sections. One is against reservation because it has lost its original, intended purpose, because it is just a false solution, it does not do anything substantial for the oppressed. One is against reservation not because one is for meritocracy, for social Darwinism, for aggressive violent competition. One is against reservation because it is not really a welfare scheme; its humanism is false, pathological, its humanism is just a piece of decorum.

To say 'no' to reservation is to say 'yes' to truly positive, socially constructive welfare schemes—the schemes that after the conditions of the poor and the oppressed from the very beginning—the moment they are born. It is to fight for a solid infrastructure—schools, fellowships, meaningful education, career opportunities—that makes them capable of standing on their own feet, gives them the confidence to experience equality, not inferiority or the fear that without reservation they cannot go ahead. It is to fight for a scheme that involves the elites, the fortunate ones to democratise their knowledge, to utilise their time, money and resources for collective welfare.

In the kind of pathological political culture we are witnessing today nobody seems to be bothered about the real task. The rulers postpone it. The progressive postpone it. Everyone postpones it.

The question is : how long should we postpone it and go for false, superficial, stupid solutions ?

Mandal Commission's Recommendations

A CRITICAL VIEW

A. RAMAIAH

Prime Minister V.P. Singh's assurance to implement the Manal Commission recommendations no doubt reflects his commitment to fulfil the election promises. If he succeeds in this stupendous task, this will be one of the most significant achievements of the National Front Government. With a fair degree of confidence one can also contend that this success will bring recognition and dividends to the National Front in general and the Janata Dal in particular throughout India.

Before implementing the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, with is imperative now for the NF Government is that it should be prepared to face the stark reality that reservation for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) would ignite the pent-up feelings of simmering dissatisfaction, developed over the years on the issue of the existing caste-based reservation, of unemployed youth and students belonging to high castes and other religious groups. India is not so inert and

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quiescent as it was once assumed to be. Ignoring the voice of those agitating against reservations may uncork unprecedented violence all over India.

Certainly, it is a tight-rope walking for the NF Government. The Prime Minister has to take a careful stand that can appease all the citizens of India and relieve himself from the present precarious position. Given the socio economic reality what could be his justifiable stand on reservation for the OBCs? Arriving at a solution that can bridge the existing socio-economic disparities through reservation needs a clear understanding of the principal aim of the reservation policy and for whom it was meant.

The reservation policy was introduced with a view to achieving equal social status to a section of population which has been oppressed, exploited and socially degraded to a large extent for centuries together. This oppressed section is being called by various nomenclatures: untouchables, Harijans, Scheduled Castes/Tribes (SC/ST), depressed classes.

The crux of the problem here is the claims of the Mandal Commission, set up by the Janata Government in 1979 and headed by B.P. Mandal, the former Chief Minister of Bihar, to reserve 27 per cent of jobs for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) alongwith the existing reservation of 22.5 per cent for the SC/STs. The Commission demands reservation for the OBCs under Article 15(4) of the Constitution which declares: "Nothing in this article or in clause 2 of Article 29 (Protection of Minorities) shall prevent the State from making any special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes". The most question is: who come under the socially and educationally backward classes?

According to the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, the caste factor was recognised at the all-India level as the indicator of social backwardness and welfare measures were suggested accordingly to some identified as depressed castes. The 1935 Act later developed these welfare measures into reservation for those identified as socially backward.

The Kaka Kalelkar Commission (1955) identified 2399 castes of which 839 were the most backward castes. The

Mandal Commission (1978), however, identified 3743 Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in 1980.

Are the socially and educationally backward classes (OBCs) different from the SCs and STs? Misunderstanding of what the founding fathers meant by "socially and educationally backward classes" has led to very many misinterpretations. The term "class" is generally attributed to economic condition. Since here it is used for both socially and educationally backward classes, it does not give and clue to think that it is about economic backwardness. The rational understanding of these terms would be that it is a class or a section of people who continues to suffer from social disabilities not only because they belong to a low caste but also because of their educational backwardness. Only these sections or classe have been named as the SCs and STs. If the SCs and STs are different from the socially and educationally backward classes, the Constitution-makers would have written socially and educationally backward classes "and" and the SCs and ST. Since they considered both the same, they have written socially and educationally backward classes "or" the SCs and STs. In fact these terms—"socially and educationally backward classes" explain the state of the SCs and STs.

While the Harijans at times suffer from social disabilities, especially in the villages, even after achieving higher education and better employment, the middle caste people, most of whom come under the OBCs, enjoy better social status even otherwise like the high castes. The OBCs on the one hand blames Brahmins for the existing caste system and on the other suppresses the SC/STs to prove their caste superiority. If reservation is meant for those who suffer from social disabilities, the claims of the OBCs becomes invalid. In fact it is the middle caste people who perpetuate caste discrimination the most these days, especially in South India. For example, a ten year old boy belonging to the OBC category calling a grown up SC man by this stigmatised identity in public places and ordering him to hold his footwear in hand while walking through the residential areas of high caste people is still a common phenomenon in many villages like Akiramesi, situated about 34 km away from Paramakudi (taluk), in

Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu which is one of the educationally advanced States.

Of course, the Brahmins are responsible for the creation of *varna* system and a majority of them strictly practice untouchability still. But in general, they do not indulge in violence to maintain their status quo. When the OBCs already enjoy superior social status than the SC/STs, why do they need reservation to improve their social status ?

The claim of the OBCs may be acceptable on one ground that they are economically poor and, therefore, they need to be helped by the government. But the government support to improve their economic status need not be only through reservation. The reservation policy is not a poverty alleviation programme. If we consider it so, at least for the present discussion, we should also consider the high caste people and the others belonging to different religions who too are economically poor.

Considering the reservation policy as one of the poverty alleviation programmes let us see how far it is justifiable in our caste ridden society. The problem of economic backwardness is not only of Indians. It is everywhere, of course, at different levels and forms. But the unique problem which only India is facing is the caste system—the system which prohibits certain sections of population from engaging in those occupations which would bring them a higher social status. This deplorable situation keeps India still in a shameful position at the international level. It is this despicable evil that all the social reformers and committed national leaders wanted to discard first from the Indian social fabric soon after independence. Precisely for this reason the reservation policy was introduced.

We on the one hand claim that we have broken the caste based occupation system, so let the reservation be on economic basis ; and on the other hand we all prefer only the SC/STs as the scavengers. Why should we restrict such occupations to the SCs and ST only ? Let these jobs be open to everybody. Those who talk of economic backwardness too much should take up these jobs to improve their economic status. But the reality is that no high caste member will prefer this occupation

whatever be the extent of economic backwardness for obvious reasons. A device like reservation can do a lot in breaking the caste-based occupation system. But the question is : do we really want that to happen ?

Having understood the fact that the provision of reservation is needed only for those who suffer from social disabilities like the SCs and the STs, let us now analyse the possible social implications of the "policy of reservation on economic basis".

Reservation on the economic basis is indeed a welcome demand. Unfortunately, in India the individuals' social status largely depend on their caste hierarchy unlike in the USSR and the USA where the individuals' status is measured in terms of the merits they have and have nots of high caste and low caste, Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and so on. So our efforts to narrow down the economic disparities without bridging these social differences will only have their serious repercussions on the unity and integrity of our society. When the provisions of reservation is given on economic basis, the social respect or dignity to each individual in society should also be on economic basis. Unfortunately, we have not been able to achieve it so far. One can come out of a low economic status if he enjoys a better social status (high caste) but with low social status (low caste) it is difficult for a person to improve his economic status without any external support like reservation. So without according a better social status to the SC/STs, talking of reservation on economic basis is not justifiable.

It is now important to understand what would be the implication of reservation on an economic basis without achieving better social status to the SC/STs.

Reservation on economic basis will have its implications on the strength of different religious groups. Once the policy of reservation on economic basis is made constitutional, most of the SCs, especially in Tamil Nadu, will convert themselves to Islam where they have been well-received and accepted. Meenakshipuram in Madurai, Perumpachery near Manamadurai and Kuryur near Ramanathapuram are the classic examples of the conversion of the SCs to Islam in Tamil Nadu.

The exploitation and humiliation they face are such that they indeed look for a chance every day to redeem themselves from Hinduism. It is only for those education and employment opportunities given in the reservation policy that they have been advised by some of the Dalit intellectuals not to go for religious conversion now. Mass conversion of Harijans who constitute about 30 per cent of India's population will definitely cause great social upheavals.

An important aspect to be taken into consideration while going for reservation on economic basis is the problem involved in identifying those who are really economically backward. Even in the organised sector it is difficult to know the real income and property of a person and in the unorganised sector it is all the more difficult. In the given socio-economic and administrative set-up, only the rich can obtain income certificates stating that he/she is economically very poor and avail the provisions meant for poor. This will not only widen the gap between the rich and the poor, but also nurture corruption right from the grass-root level. But in caste-based reservation we hardly come across a high caste person identifying himself as SC/ST for employment reasons due to the stigma attached to these caste groups.

When we accept the policy of reservation on economic basis and make special provisions for all the 3/43 OBCs, we must also consider all the poor irrespective of their caste and religious identities. When poverty does not discriminate people on caste and religious grounds, why should the 'poverty alleviation programme', the reservation policy, discriminate people on these grounds ?

In the light of the foregoing discussion, what can authentically be concluded is that the reservation which is meant exclusively for the purpose of achieving a better social status for those who suffer from social disabilities (like the SC/STs) should be provided only to them and not to those who come under the OBC category and who do not suffer from any social discrimination. If any caste group in the OBC category is found to suffer from social discrimination like the SC/STs, the caste group should be included in the list of the SC/STs.

Implementing the recommendations of Mandal Commission

without necessary changes will only create communal disharmony. The Commission should identify various ways and means of helping the OBCs financially to establish their own means of livelihood and also to improve their economic condition. More funds should be allocated for this purpose. Extending the various provisions of the reservation only to the OBCs is unjustifiable. What about the lakhs of poor uneducated and unemployed youths belonging to high castes and other religious groups ?

However, for better education and employment reasons, reservation is essential for the SC/STs. It is necessary for them as the society in fact does not allow them to take up any occupation other than the traditionally accepted ones which have all along kept them as untouchables. This is essential for them because only such a policy can take them away from the menial, unclean and dirty occupations and accommodate them in those professions/occupations which would bring them a better socio-economic status.

Establishing a business centre or any other self-employment scheme will not be a problem for the OBCs once they are financially supported. So it is not necessary that the Mandal Commission should help them only through reservation. Instead, it should review its recommendations and advice both the Centre and the State Governments to set up various committees that can come out with various ways and means of improving the economic condition of the OBCs. Efforts should also be made to render similar support to all the poor irrespective of their caste and religious identities.

For the SC/STs, reservation per SC cannot be a panacea. What is more imperative of all is "let us shed the illusion of caste and religious superiority and inferiority that we have inherited from our 'glorious past' and try to civilise ourselves to look at each other just as human beings."

Mandal Commission : Educational Impact

AMRIK SINGH

That the implementation of the Mandal commission recommendations will have far-reaching social and economic consequences is obvious. What is going to be its impact if, as recommended by the commission, reservations for other backward classes (OBCs) are extended to educational institutions ?

First, the impact will be felt mainly at the higher and professional level. Education till the age of 14 is compulsory as well as free. For all practical purposes, it is also free till the age of 16 : the + 2 classes are taken to be a part of the school set-up. At that level there is no discrimination either for or against anyone. The real problem will arise at the college level.

Those who long thought that higher and professional education had been pampered and elementary education starved will now find themselves outflanked. Tremendous pressures will be exerted for expanding the facilities at the higher level, reducing hopes that more funds might in future be available for elementary education.

Capitation fee

Secondly, capitation-fee colleges will get a boost. This black market in education has been a menace for a quarter century or more. All attempts to stop it have been defeated, principally because nobody has been sincere about it. The new minister of education began by opposing the system with a certain degree of sincerity. Whether he would have succeeded or not is a moot question. Likely enough he would have failed. But in the light of new developments he is bound to fail.

If 50 per cent of all seats are reserved for certain categories, what happens to others who till yesterday were qualified to enter but now find there is no seat for them? On the one hand, they will work for expanded higher and professional education, and, on the other, plead strongly for a growing private sector where they can at least get admission even if the rate of payment is inflated.

Brain drain

At the undergraduate stage it is not easy to go abroad. Therefore, they will have their undergraduate education locally and then go abroad for post-graduate and research work, as seems to be general practice even today. Since government employment too will become restricted for such people, more and more of them will look for jobs abroad. The brain drain, which is already quite a problem, will get intensified further. This will be the third direct consequence of Mandalisation.

Fourthly, there is bound to be extensive student protest in various parts of the country. Most of this will take the form of angry outbursts and will not have any sense of direction. All political parties whether they approve of this decision or not have taken the position that they are for it. None dare criticise it for fear of losing electoral support. In a sense Mr V.P. Singh has upstaged them all.

In terms of student politics, this could have one very interesting consequence. Almost all student organisations are more or less extensions of political parties. Since every party professes to be for the Mandal commission, what kind of advice will they give to their respective student wings? By the

look of it, they may simply drag their feet and let the students more or less flounder on their own.

A step forward

But some students may see through the game and come to the conclusion that all these years they have been made use of by the various political parties. Should this feeling become widespread, they can then start organising on their own. If they do, it will be a significant step forward.

Mandalisation will also have an impact on the recruitment of academics. For a couple of decades, if not more, the UGC has repeatedly urged the universities to comply with the statutory requirement of 15 plus 7.5 per cent reservation for SC and ST candidates. In actual practice not even one-fourth of this quota is filled, partly because enough suitable candidates are not available. OBCs are not as educationally backward as the SC and ST categories. Many more of them will be available. Even so they may not be able to fill the quota of 27 per cent.

In certain professional lines such as medicine and engineering, a degree matters but competence is no less important. If we are ill, we go to the best doctor and not to someone who is qualified but not necessarily competent. The same logic can be extended to teaching. With poor teachers, the quality of education is bound to be poor. To induct a large number of qualified but incompetent teachers will without question damage academic life in the long run.

Basic problem

The root of our troubles is our sustained neglect of elementary education for over four decades. In consequence, about one-third of the Indian people are literate today. This is the census figure. In fact, only one-third or one-fourth of this one-third can both read and write. We are now entering a phase where, having destroyed elementary education, we will wreck higher education too.

This is not an argument against reservations in principle. Reservations are useful up to a point and for a certain duration.

When they keep being extended, as in respect of SC and ST students, it indicates only, one thing : we are not doing the job honestly and are resorting to dodges and subterfuges. In the ultimate analysis, reservations make it more difficult to solve the basic problem—the neglect of primary education.

We are now embarking upon a policy where most pressures will favour higher and professional education and much less money will be available for elementary education. Instead of helping ourselves therefore we will hurt ourselves further. In a sense, our past has now caught up with us and all that we can now do is to tie ourselves up in knots even further. The alternative is to attend to the basic problem, but that is precisely what we will not do.

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

Nationalist Disarray

Renewed Importance of Ayodhya

SWAPAN DASGUPTA

Even as Indian society is being rapidly polarised into antagonistic caste formations, there is great jubilation in Mr V.P. Singh's camp. The elation is not entirely unjustified. Despite the fierce agitation against the decision partially to implement the Mandal Commission report, there is a creeping realisation in political circles that the agenda for the foreseeable future is being set by the Prime Minister Mr V.P. Singh may have been stripped of his Rajarshi title by the pundits of Kashi and he may have alienated those dominant castes, such as the Jats, who have been left out by the Mandal report, but there is little doubt that he has at the same time emerged as the strident Messiah of backward populism.

The Prime Minister's seemingly triumphant march has been made possible by a number of factors. First, the vocal opposition to Mandalisation has, by and large, been confined to students and the intelligentsia, who by definition lack the strategic clout to enforce their will on the political establishment. Their helplessness has been reinforced by the fact that the agitations

are sporadic and lack both organisation and co-ordination. Isolated flames in the bush do not necessarily add up to a single prairie fire.

Political support

More to the point, the anti-Mandal agitation has been hamstrung by the absence of overt support from the political parties. The curious ambivalence of the two Communist parties is, perhaps, only to be expected. In the absence of any genuine class polarisation, those bearing the tattered red flag have been known to take unprincipled short-cuts. Like the Adhikari thesis that supported the formation of Pakistan, and Randive's ultra-Leftism that pronounced independence to be a sham, the refusal to attack casteist resurgence is another example of deranged revolutionism.

But what is less comprehensible is the total disarray within the two nationalist parties—the Congress and the BJP. What marks these two formations from the rest of the political mainstream is their commitment to a composite Indian nationalism. True, as Mr V.P. Singh was quick to point out to Mr Rajiv Gandhi in Parliament last Thursday, the Congress under Indira Gandhi was equally guilty of using caste as an instrument of mobilisation. But the critical difference is that these attempts at political manipulation were localised and were, in any case, never intended as alternatives to a pan-Indian identity.

The track record of the Congress governments at the Centre clearly shows that they have always been mindful of the crucial importance of a regenerated Hindu society as the central pillar of Indian nationalism. For all Jawaharlal Nehru's apparent disregard for organised religion, it was his government that took a major step towards the creation of a composite Hindu identity by codifying the personal laws. The policy of affirmative action for Scheduled Castes was an extension of Mahatma Gandhi's crusade to rid Hindu society of the curse of untouchability. Indeed, the Mahatma's critique of Santanism was conducted within the parameters of religious discourse, a reason why he resolutely opposed the British government's

attempt in 1932 to detach Harijans from Hindu society. It was not, and was never intended to be, a Westernised, secular critique of Hinduism.

The Congress tradition was unquestionably shaped by the ongoing social reform movements that were located within mainstream Hinduism and which perceived Hindu consolidation as a natural corollary to the development of Indian nationalism. It is no accident, for example, that the Congress anthem throughout the struggle for independence was *Vande Mataram*, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's song that used overt Hindu symbolism.

The crucial difference between the Congress and the BJP is one of emphasis and tradition. Whereas the Congress vision of nationalism concentrates, although implicitly, more on the essence of Hindu consolidation, the BJP focusses inordinately on explicit symbols and mythology. Moreover there is marked absence of shared political tradition between the two parties. The early RSS leadership, for example, perceived the Sangha as one that would provide the moral leadership to Hindu society and not be in the forefront of political activism.

Tenuous link

Consequently, the RSS links with the nationalist leadership were tenuous and even these were snapped in the aftermath of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. As such, almost the entire leadership of the BJP has been nurtured on a diet of blind anti-Congressism. Mr Balasaheb Deoras did attempt to rectify this distortion between 1982 and 1986, but the process was halting and imperfect.

It is necessary to emphasise the common political ground occupied by the Congress and the BJP, not least because the two parties appear to be the prime targets of Mr V.P. Singh's Mandal manoeuvre.

For the BJP, the political fall-out of Mandal is potentially devastating. As a party that has tried to project the idyllic notion of an undifferentiated Hindu society, the legitimisation of caste as a basis of political organisation can be very damaging. First, the Mandal Commission attacks the basis of Hindu

consolidation by reinforcing a set of alternative social allegiances. In practical terms, this casteist regroupment may mean that the BJP will once again have to confront the familiar problem of being naturally identified with its Brahmin-Bania core. Having recently made inroads among the so-called backward castes in the whole of North India, the BJP is threatened, if caste polarisation extends to electoral behaviour, with being reduced to a rump.

In more immediate terms, the focus on the Mandal Commission constitutes an organised assault on the Ram Janambhoomi agitation. By making ritual backward status a political attribute, the government has, in effect, questioned the underlying Sanskritising logic of participation in the quasi-religious ceremonies associated with the movement. Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav has, in fact, made this direct link and equated the opposition to the Ram Janambhoomi agitation with support for the new reservations policy. It remains to be seen whether the BJP's double-speak on the Mandal Commission can successfully blunt Mr Yadav's offensive.

Nor is the BJP likely to be the only casualty of Mr V.P. Singh's offensive. Besides questioning the very basis of a composite Hindu identity, the emphasis on caste in public life is calculated to limit the horizons of politics to mindless primordialism. If this happens, the Congress will not escape unscathed since, even more than the BJP, its electoral strategy is based on universal appeals that override community and caste.

Sectional interests

The recent clamour for reservations for all minority communities is a pointer that Mandalisation is infections, and this has potentiality of adversely affecting the Congress. In any case, recent events demonstrate that Mr V.P. Singh is far more adept than Mr Gandhi in championing sectional interests.

In short, Mr V.P. Singh's government has launched a frontal attack on the very assumption of nationalism which, if unchecked, can result in politically acute fragmentation. True, the dangers are far more acute in the North, but the danger of a fractured Centre has profound implications for the whole country.

Nor is the problem likely to go away if the pressure against the new reservations is sustained. On the contrary, there is every possibility that this will sharpen divisions by further aggravating the forwards backwards divide. In any case, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that Mr V.P. Singh is in any mood to oblige his detractors or even meet his critics half way. The harsh truth is that while the progress of Mandal can be checked, the existing policy will not be reversed irrespective of which party comes to power.

The fragmentation of India, it would seem, can only be arrested by creating alternative focal points of national consolidation that will relegate caste identity to the background. It is in this context that the movement in Ayodhya is of critical importance. The defeat of the BJP on this issue will, in one important sense only aggravate the crisis of India nationalism.

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

Bihar : The forward march of the backward castes

DURGANATH JHA

It was in the aftermath of the Kamraj Plan in 1963 that the then Congress chief minister of Bihar, Mr Binodanand Jha, who has being eased out to pave way for his old political adversary, Mr Krishna Ballabh Sahay, opted for Mr Beer Chand Patel as his group's candidate to contest the leadership election. Mr Jha's decision took a large number of even his ardent supporters by surprise for, until then, people found it hard to believe that a backward caste nominee could reach the helm of administration in a caste-ridden state like Bihar.

Mr Patel was defeated in the contest heralding a new chapter in the history of the then undivided Congress which saw itself going out of power for the first time in the next general election of 1967. But his selection as a contestant, never the less continues to be a subject of discussion with some blaming the late Mr Jha even today saying that it was he who made the backward caste people aware of their political leverage. Others are of the opinion that being a shrewd politician, he had the capacity to visualise the things to come.

Today, the backward castes have come to occupy the centrestage in politics at both the state and national level as is evident from the recent reservation of 27 per cent jobs for them in Central services and public sector undertakings.

Mr Patel was a Kurmi from an ancient caste of cultivators spread over the entire Ganga basin. Even though they live in the company of Bhumihar landowners, in many castes, they owned larger holding than the Bhumihars. However, there were several sects of Kurmis and all of them were not as prosperous as those living in Patna and Nalanda. In some north Bihar districts, where they are known by other names, their condition is no better than landless agricultural labourers and they are not treated on par with their counterparts in Patna or Nalanda.

Since the Kurmis of the Ganga Basin are land-owning castes their traditional foes, the Yadavs have joined hands with them in their fight to attain social and political justice for the backwards. Their enmity was more pronounced in rural areas and this later extended to urban areas and to some extent to the political field.

Perhaps, keeping this in mind, Mr Jha's successor, Mr K.B. Sahay inducted Mr Ramlakhan Singh Yadav, into his cabinet and gave the important PWD portfolio to him. Mr Yadav succeeded in preparing a band of new government contractors in various works departments who comprised mostly neo-rich Yadavs. He also helped in creating an atmosphere where Yadavs and some other backward castes felt the need of sending their children for higher studies and thus compete with others in various professions.

While this exercise in the Congress camp was going on, the non-Congress opposition was building up its base. The general elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962 had made them, especially the socialists, aware of the fact that their real base was among the socially backward castes and that these castes could not go ahead unless they had wealth, literacy and proper government patronage.

The 1967 election provided them the first opportunity to form the government and though the Samyukta Socialist Party under the leadership of Mr Karpoori Thakur, a backward,

was all set to emerge as the largest group, Mr Thakur had to remain content with the deputy chief ministership. Backwards, nonetheless, were impatient Mr B.P. Mandal's step of 1968 wherein he led 40 MLAs to break the Mahamaya government to form the Shoshit Samaj Dal government was seen by many as an exercise in this direction. But the victory turned out to be a short-lived.

The successive short-lived governments gave way to the 1969 by election to the state assembly and though it provided an opportunity to two backwards, Mr Karpoori Thakur (SSP) and Mr Daroga Prasad Rai (Congress) to become chief ministers, the consolidation of backward castes as a force to reckon with yet to be achieved. Mr Rai, however, will be remembered for helping in this process by two of his controversial decisions. First, he appointed Mr R.S. Mandal, a backward, as the state's chief secretary after super-sending more than three dozen IAS and ICS officers. Second, he constituted the Mungeri Lal committee to study the desirability of providing reservation in government jobs for socially backward castes. The Daroga Prasad Rai ministry went out of power before the Mungeri Lal committee could submit its report and the subsequent election to the assembly, held in the background of the Bangladesh war and the 1971 Congress landslide, saw Congress recapturing power in Bihar after five years. The backward castes, though politically alert and assertive by this time, had however, to remain in the background as none of the successive Congress chief ministers, Mr Kedar Pandey, Mr Abdul Ghafoor and Dr Jagannath Mishra were prepared to succumb to their pressures.

The 1977 election in the after-math of the emergency came as a windfall to these castes as they saw Rajputs and traditional Congress supporters like minorities coming into their camp to teach the emergency heroes a lesson. They exhibited their political sagacity by allowing the Rajputs to remain in the forefront and hence there was no opposition from them when Mr Satyendra Narain Sinha was accepted as the Bihar Janata chief. But once their target of mauling the Congress at the hustings was achieved, they united to make Mr Karpoori Thakur their chief minister.

Mr Thakur left nothing to chance and immediately after assuming office retrieved the Mungeri Lal committee report on job reservation. He saw to it that economically prosperous backward castes like the Bania, Kurmis and Yadavs were counted as other backward castes (OBC) and given only eight per cent reservation against 12 per cent provided to the most backward castes (MBCS). To make his decision look more judicious, he reserved three per cent posts each for economically backward females and people belonging to other castes.

Mr Thakur's decision was therefore, not appreciated by the financially affluent OBCS, especially the Yadavs and Kurmis.

The failure of the Janata experiment and subsequent return in 1980 of the Congress provided them an opportunity to build renewed pressure on the government to enlarge the reservation provisions. While the Union government succumbed to their pressure only to the extent of allowing the continuance of the second backward commission headed by Mr B.P. Mandal, the Bihar government, under the leadership of Dr Jagannath Mishra, enlarged the provisions to almost all the levels ; local bodies, universities, chnical institutions and even in promotions.

But one fact, however, remained clear in the social as well as political scenario of the Hindu heartland : backwards, on their own, are still not in a position to help their parties win elections. They succeeded in their bid only in 1967, 1977 and 1989-90. And on all these occasions they had the support of minorities and some forward castes like the Rajputs and Bumihars. Whether the acceptance of the Mandal Commission report in the background of Mr Devi Lal's removal will help them emerge as an independent force to reckon with remains to be seen.

Courtesy : Times of India.

Discussion

Whither Mandal Commission ?

An Invitation for Dialogue

KUMAR SANJAY SINGH
SANJAY MISHRA and SHAYANTAN GHOSAL

More than a fortnight has passed since the government made its intention clear for the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations. This decision triggered off apparently spontaneous protests - both violent and non-violent—and criticism of the Mandal Commission report on various grounds by intellectuals. This frantic activity on the part of the public and the print media becomes all the more striking when compared with the stony silence of the political parties broken infrequently with statements which do not indicate any clear opinion.

Despite this it is becoming clear that the trend is towards a crystallisation of public opinion on two opposite poles—for and against the Mandal Commission report. This is indeed unfortunate because due to this even the critics of the government have not been able to expose the precise nature and drawbacks of the reservation policy as it is being considered

for implementation and have limited their arguments to the premise decided by the government thus reducing the whole issue to the false problem of analysis of the Mandal Commission report in general.

We feel that such arguments fall short on two grounds ;

- (1) They do not explain the reason behind the selective implementation of the Mandal Commission report by the government that is, the acceptance of reservations in government jobs in favour of other recommendations of the Mandal Commission emphasising *progressive* land reforms and structural changes in the relations of production in the villages, special educational facilities etc.
- (2) The real cause behind the genesis of the present movement is not adequately tackled.

We in this paper want to take up these issues which, we hope, would facilitate the development of the debate in more fruitful directions.

We understand that the latest agitation is the result of a crisis in the Indian state which has failed (purposely ?) to solve the crisis of unemployment due to a change in the alliances of the sections of the ruling class and thus has ceased to play the role of a 'welfare' state. These agitations and the consequent critiques of Mandal Commission report, however, are primarily concerned with two issues : (1) Whether it is valid to grant protective discrimination to the OBCs especially in the light of the dismal results of the reservation policy for the Schedule Castes (SC) and Schedule Tribes (ST). If yes, and this is not an unanimous response to the question, one often hears a negative response. (2) What should be the criteria used for identifying the beneficiary groups ?

Let us begin with the negative reply to the first question. Our first response to the question would be in the negative. No negative response to the question would be legitimate because it flies against the basic values and goals of social transformation as envisaged in the Directive Principles of State Policy laid down in the Constitution. Moreover its argument suffers from a double shortcoming, firstly because it limits its audience to the upper castes and by default leaves

the backward castes as an already cultivated interest group for the adversary ; and secondly, precisely because of the first shortcoming it leaves the government to get away with populist measures which are undertaken to hide the existing contradictions in society, than to solve them.

The alternative responses to the question are derived from a variety of perspectives attempting to devise the criteria for identifying the beneficiaries. These responses can be listed as follows :

- (1) Secular categories such as the rate of literacy, income, etc that is, the basically economic criteria with certain variables added or deleted. This response cannot countenance the use of castes categories as the basic unit of reservation policy because the responders feel it engenders castesim.
- (2) A response which through it is critical of the way caste category is used in the Mandal Commission report, still thinks that caste is a valid category for identifying the beneficiaries.

While dealing with the first we find that the alternative to caste as a beneficiary is riddled with inconsistency at least in the present context. In one of the alternatives the economic status (wage, resources etc.) of a household is posited as the alternative that is economy in the narrow sense. Apart from the difficulty in achieving even a satisfactory data by the government machinery, this makes the fundamental error in assuming that social categories like caste or class are the sum total of the households. In this view household can be seen in two ways : (i) Family is seen as an a-historical and socially non-specific concept, and (ii) Visualised as fluctuating with every generation. In the latter case the household is reduced to an illusive chimera not permitting any generalisation, while in the former the truth value of the generalisation drawn, on which one can formulate any policy, would be a suspect. Clearly then this approach creates more problems than it solves.

At least economy in the broader sense, that is, when viewed in the sense of class differentiation, does not suffer this handicap. The basic contention of this argument is that (1) caste categories are ultimately divisive and obstruct the development of a

'genuine' class consciousness. Drawing from this it is felt that any policy based on caste would further strengthen caste feeling and hence should be criticised ; (2) reform based on caste categories fail to take into account the class differentiation within the other backward castes. This goes against the values and purpose of the reservation policy as most of the benefits of reservation would be cornered by them at the expense of more needy sections of society.

Further, it is argued, the logic of stratification of society on the basis of affluence and poverty is not similar to differentiation of caste which has more to do with ritual sanctions, that is, ideological reidues or dysfunctional norms of the preceeded social formation. This argument can indeed sum up impressive data to show the existence of Brahmins and other high castes living in object poverty and contrast it with the affluence of intermediate castes such a Yadavs, Kurmis Koeris, etc.

Apart from the validity of this absolute dichotomy between economy and caste which we shall dycuss later, this approach has a contradiction is so basic that it goes unnoticed. Any policy of reservation makes sense only if the potential group identified is capable of utilising the opportunity made available to it. Now we know that in the present reservation policy announced by the government the sectors which arc opened for protective discrimination are the Central Government service and public sector undertakings. From this we can safely deduce that the majority of the economically backward (and educationally backward !) would not be able to avail these jobs since most of them would not be able to fulfil the minimum qualification necessary for the bulk of these jobs. Moreover, there is nothing inherent in the economic criteria which by its own logic would negate the process of elite formation in the persent context.

Moreover, we feel that the separation of economy from caste categories is based on shaky grounds. The approach emphasising economy in the broader sense is quite right in pointing out that changes in the nature of the production process, with the emergence of a new division of labour, introduction of commercialisation and new technology have changed the nature of stratification in Indian society resulting in a

shift from a traditional society stratified on the basis of castes with rigid definition of professional and ritual status to a society more open to mobility. Further, there is the insistence that this change in the nature of stratification is also reflected in the type of inequality engendered, that is, the shift from inequality based on ritual status and concerns of purity and pollution to a system of inequality which is based much more fundamentally on economy (actual possession of resource, both land and capital).

Yet the contention that economy necessarily negates caste category and that the two categories are mutually exclusive does not hold much water. On this point we would argue that although there is a difference in the logic of economy and caste, in Indian society they are closely related. This view is better equipped in analysing the decline in the possibility of upward mobility as we go down the caste hierarchy. It is interesting to note that the most common examples cited to indicate the upward mobility of the OBCs in terms of capital and land accumulation and also political power are the intermediary caste not the lower castes. And importantly, this mobility is expressed in caste categories and both by the people of these intermediary castes as well as the observers from outside, that is, they have arisen as Yadavs, etc,

This is specially true of political power, and this is not surprising since the *jati* kinship ties are still quite capable in the redistribution of some of the loot gained from the state. This alongwith certain perceived affinities based on identity of rituals, etc. help to sustain the incorporating logic of the castes.

Another example showing this link is the failure of the government initiatives of land reform and the Harijan upliftment programme. One of the reasons behind this failure in implementation is that the bureaucracy utilised the loopholes in the programme to the advantage of the upper castes. This should not be surprising since the political instruments are not neutral but explicitly or implicitly the very props on which these inequalities are sustained. Because it is through these channels that the kinship network can keep its redistributive and incorporating function intact.

This adds a further problem for the view emphasising on economy and its variables. While these categories in their obsolete sense may be secular but the machinery supposed to implement is riddled with caste contradictions. And now we are faced with a paradoxical result, that an uncritical acceptance of these 'neutral' categories will provide to means for the dominant castes to corner most of the benefits offered and thus strengthen the existing caste ties. This would ultimately enhance casteism.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this :

- (1) That the largest chunk of the poor and deprived of the *Indian Society*, belong to the sections below the intermediary castes.
- (2) The reality of the kinship ensures that persons of the same economic status and belonging to different poles of caste hierarchy do not have equality of opportunity. The poverty of a Mussahar and a Brahmin is not the same. The caste structure confines a 'Mussahar' to a ghetto, with a life style and a degrading occupation which is not true for the Brahmin.

Quite evidently then, there is a need for affirmative action in favour of the backward castes. Yet the question of the validity of the Mandal Commission's definition of caste as a category of analysis and the identification of the castes as OBC in light of the recommendations made is criticised by the view emphasising the validity of caste as the criteria for identifying the beneficiary group.

This has presented a critique of Mandal Commission on two inter-related points: (1) The definition of caste in the Mandal Commission does not take into account the changed nature of caste in a modern society where the basis of inequality has shifted from the traditional ritual based inequality to one based on economy. Further, the Commission overlooks the fact that castes are often divided into various sub-castes and the relationship of superiority and inferiority, both material and ritual, exists between them. Thus one finds that the caste category Yadav subsumes within it subcastes like Gwala, Ahir, Gope, Sadgope and Ghasi. The relative power in balance between these categories is not dwelt upon in the Mandal

Commission. Similarly, the relationship of Awadhia, Kurmi with other Kurmi subcastes is not dealt with.

(2) Drawing from the first, it is said that because of this faulty definition the report fails to take adequate notice of the rise of intermediary castes like Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri, bania, etc. which have moved up the social ladder due to the accumulation of land capital and political power.

From this it is concluded that there has emerged a powerful elite within the OBCs which has arisen more at the expense of castes further down the social order. Thus they argue that economic criteria should be applied within the OBCs to prevent the elite from cornering the gains of the reservation policy which would make a mockery of the values behind the reservation policy. But this argument in itself is not sufficient in ensuring that the policy is saved from the dismal fate of culminating in the creation of an elite within the OB caste now favoured within practically no percolation of the benefits of the reform down their ranks.

Within this logic a possible alternative would be to rotate reservation between different OB castes or sets of OB castes grouped on an economic basis for a limited period of time, say a two yearly basis. But logically if the broad context within which the policy would be operated remains the same all that this policy would succeed in doing would be a creation of elites in all the castes clubbed within the OBCs. Although it has to be admitted that in this case the elites would have a relatively narrow base in the first round of the rotation.

Additionally, one can also argue for measures to limit the possibility of the policy remaining within the generations of the initial beneficiaries. Here we are again confronted with the dilemma that no such measure can be successful, till we have a successive crop of backward castes, capable of utilising the opportunity made available to it. And it is precisely on this issue that this view is silent, and of course there is nothing logical or inherent in the measures suggested by this trend which would allow the benefits to reach unobstructed the lowest section of the other backward castes.

The other point on which both these approaches are silent

is on the causality of the movements protesting against the implementation of Mandal Commission. On this issue we submit that labelling the movement as a forward caste movement does not explain much. Such a labelling still has to explain how this casteist movement is different from other mobilisations based on caste, say for instance the mobilisation of the Rajputs on the Decorala *sati* case, Further, the fact of the confinement of this movement largely within Hindi heartland, Orissa and Gujarat also has to be explained.

In our view this movement is in a fundamental sense a manifestation of the crisis of Indian state which in this instance has failed to solve the problem of unemployment in the context of changing alliance between different sections of the ruling class and the consequent need to cultivate a stable and mass base which permits, at least temporarily, to cater to the needs of the industrial capital and rural rich at the expense of the big capital, in alliance with the constantly swelling (demographically) pettybourgeoisie.

As we have shown, none of the trends indicated above come nowhere near the identification of this crisis and as a result has reduced the question of reservation to a moral issue. Although this indeed should be an important component of concerns over the reservation policy, it is rather empty for the purpose of analysis of the implications of the policy in the present scenario. As a result, the suggestions made till now are liable to face a paradoxical situation, whereby the greater success of the policy implemented on their suggestion would face protest in direct proposition to the success.

This is not to say that there have been no attempts to reconcile reservation with the issue of employment. There have been arguments for the reduction of the percentage of reserved seats in view of the existing unemployment. But they don't give us any rationale on which a percentage of seats to be reduced can be achieved without qualifying the basic values of reservation. Further, it should be pointed out the existing extent of reservation—27 per cent—is already a result of such a reduction. But what is much more important is that these attempts, alongwith those discussed earlier, see the recent reservation of seats in the government jobs and unemployment

as arising out of two different disconnected logic. The editorial of one of our national dailies demanding more jobs rather than reservations, takes this separation to its logical extreme.

We feel that this tendency of positioning the reservation policy for the OBCs against unemployment is a result of an analytical myopia which prevents it from explaining the cause behind the selective implementation of the Mandal Commission report. This can be brought out only if we develop the discussion along the lines suggested by us, which would show that the present reservation policy and the increasing crisis of unemployment is the effect of the same cause.

To bring out the full implications of the arguments we would deal briefly with the nature of Indian capitalism and the contradictions inherent in it, that the state has to manage. From its inception the sovereign Indian state was faced with three major contending sections of the ruling class: Big Business, the regional bourgeoisie, the rural land owning elite and their ally the petty-bourgeoisie. If we follow the way these tensions have been articulated, we find the structural imperatives behind the necessity of restricted adoption of the reservation policy, that is restricting it to government jobs and leaving out the recommendations on land reform and education.

From the First Five Year Plan to 1969 we get a picture of the state aligning with the interests of the regional bourgeoisie in check. The state adopts this strategy through the burdens of the relatively young state form. By this very logic to acquire and the rural land owning elite to keep the big bourgeoisie legitimacy, the state catered to the need of the petty-bourgeoisie. Yet this alliance was purchased at a cost. The regional and small bourgeoisie due to their weakness, could not pursue the line of unbridled capitalist accumulation, first due to the lack of infrastructural facility to provide them with processed raw material and credit.

Secondly, the alliance with the petty-bourgeoisie meant that the government had to provide jobs for the petty-bourgeoisie. Following this logic, the government's job was to set up heavy industries in the public sector and nationalise banking

and other credit giving institutions. On the other hand, the government became the prime agency for creating jobs both in the productive and non-productive sectors. Thus Nehruvian socialism and the public sector expansion was reduced to a means for creating unproductive government job, essentially bureaucratic in nature simultaneously, this become the a basis for the development of the bourgeoisie,

This trend is clear if we see the relative weight of public and private sectors. The weight of public sector in the total outlay from 1961-56 till 1969 has increased continuously. This sector provided the bulk of the jobs. Between 1961-69 the total number of employees in the public sector grew by 50 per cent which totalled three and a half million. In the year 1969 the state sector employed 10 million people in comparsion to seven million in the private sector.

All this facilitated the growth of the regional bourgeoisie and rich peasantry and gave the state a mass base. But it was riddled with a fundamental contradiction. The alliance between the regional bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie in a programme of capitalist growth within a state becoming increasingly top heavy was bound to lead to excess capacity and recession with the economy. All this would also create bottlenecks in the intensity of capitalist accumulation. So if capitalist accumulation has to grow without obstacles it would have to : 1) break or dilute its alliance with petty-bourgeoisie ; and (2) ensure that the state withdraws resources from the public sector where the capital is inefficient and hence to a large extent leads to excess capacity and recession in the economy.

All this has to be carried out in the context of fluid power equation with the subcontinent and the rise of militant regional movements in India ; forcing the state to invest more in defence and police, that is, the non-developmental sector of the public sector.

The Indian economy from the Fifth Plan onwards has taken the course dictated to it by the contradictions arising in capitalist economy mentioned in the preceding paragraph. The relative weight of the private sector is increasing steadily, and the weight of the investment in non-developmental sector is increasing ; in respect to the develop-

mental sector. Within the non-developmental sector defence outstrips the other two components that is, police and general administration increasing steadily from 33·6 per cent in 1980-81 to 38·2 per cent of the annual plan outlay of 1989-90, in comparison the other two averaged around 18 per cent per annum of the annual plan outlay.

In fact the weight of defence is greater than this since a major share of the foreign debt is incurred in the purchase of armaments. Since in the non-developmental sector the rate of increase of employment is negligible, This and the stagnant developmental sector (public sector enterprises, health and education) create a severe bottleneck in the generation of employment opportunities. This bottleneck is further tightened by the fact that the private sector has not shown any significant increase in the rate of employment. In fact our deduction based on the data taken from the economic survey of the government show that there is a tendency towards substitution of labour by capital thus foreclosing any chance of increase of employment comparable to the increase of capacity and economic weight of the private sector.

The agrarian sector, on its part, has laged far behind industrial sector and hence is not capable of any employment. On the contrary, the rich peasantry to keep in pace with the booming demand would rather want to device ways to beat the already implemented land reform programmes (a factor which perhaps explains the Devi Lal and Tikait phenomena). This clearly shows that the Indian economy is not capable of generating enough employment opportunities to satisfy the needs of the petty-bourgeoisie.

This contradiction threatened the foundations on which the alliance between the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie is based. This would have happened sooner or later and severely put into question the legitimacy of the state. Now the state to survive had to look for the possible alternative to the petty-bourgeoisie without straining its resources. It is here that the OBCs – which constitute 52 per cent of the Indian society – come into the picture. By granting reservations to the OBCs in government jobs, V.P. Singh got a constituency of almost 52 per cent of the Indian population, thereby gaining a mass

base for the present government and securing the legitimacy for the capitalist state.

Here it must be pointed out that the present anti-Mandal Commission agitation by using largely casteist slogans have let him get away with this ruse. Moreover, the existing reservation policy would not burden the coffers of the government and not hinder the progress of accumulation of capital, as the reservations are limited to government jobs. Now the weight of this sector is decreasing steadily as we have already seen. Only the non-developmental sector is showing signs of health but there too the largest chunk, that is defence is secure from reservation. And in any case this sector has not shown any marked capacity of generating employment.

Further the fact that the share in the budget allocation for education, medical facilities and public health have remained practically stagnant or declined, would ensure that no fresh crop of the OBCs capable of utilising reservation benefits can be created. This would ensure that the OBCs would never spill over the allocated 27 per cent of seats substantially, to create alarming position for the state.

Two conclusions can be made from this regarding the limitations of the Mandal Commission report :

(1) That the real weight of the benefits given to the OBCs would decline in direct proportion to the decline of the public sector's weight in Indian economy. This is a ground on which the indentity of interests between the people supporting reservation principle, and those concerned with unemployment can be achieved.

(2) The chances of these limited benefits to reach the most downtrodden of the Indian society is very slim due to the governments reluctance to invest in increasing the infrastucture of education and health. Development of both is necessary if we have to make the beneficiaries capable of utilising the reservation benefits. Another need is to introduce land reforms but this, as we have argued, would provoke an adverse reaction from an already dissatisfied agrarian land owning elite. Further, it would reduce the marketable surplus in

grain which is essential if the present trend of capitalist accumulation has to continue. The logic of the present state, therefore, would not allow this to happen.

By way of conclusion we would say that there are three alternatives for the critics and agitators—both pro and anti-reservation policy :

(1) Force the government to revoke the reservation policy. The chances of this position succeeding are very thin. By taking this position the agitation plays into the hands of the government. This could limit them within the higher castes and by default leave a mass base of 52 per cent to be manipulated by the government. In any case even if it succeeds the gains achieved would be very temporary in the face of the declining weight of government jobs in economy.

(2) Implementation of reservation in government jobs with alternations (depending on the point of view of the suggestion). But as we have shown, in the present context none of these suggestions provide a guarantee of securing long term real gains for the OBCs the create a more egalitarian society.

(3) To persuade the government to implement the present report with some minor alterations within the OBCs identified simultaneously to accept the responsibility of welfare state. By this we mean that the government should be compelled to invest more in the developmental sector which includes public sector enterprises, education, health facilities, etc. vis-a-vis the non-developmental sector. This would ensure that the beneficiary group identified would be able to utilise these opportunities opened for him. Further it would also loosen the bottlenecks on employment.

Thus, we find that this third approach is not only more rational but also has the capacity to gain maximum support since its logic does not exclude either the 'higher' castes or the 'backward' castes as its audience.

We admit that in this case the economy might have to face recession but this can be overcome by making the capital in public sector more efficient. Of course this does not ensure against recession arising out of other bottlenecks, for instance, the declining rate of profit as capitalism develops. To negate

that we would require a genuinely socialist system. But we think in our insistence on the favourable treatment of the developmental sector vis-a-vis the non-developmental sector are the seeds of the logic which can help those attempting to transform the nature of the state. As to what this link is we would leave it for the reader to explore.

Documentation

Mandal Commission Recommendations

It may appear that the upliftment of other backward classes is part of the larger national problem of the removal of mass poverty. This is only partially correct. The deprivation of OBCs is a very special case of the larger national issue : here the basic question is that of social and educational backwardness and poverty is only a direct consequence of these two crippling caste-based handicaps. As these handicaps are embedded in our social structure, their removal will require far-reaching structural changes. No less important will be changes in the perception of the problems of OBCs by the ruling classes of the country.

Reservations

One such change in the attitude of the ruling elite pertains to the provision of reservation in government services and educational institutions for the candidates of other backward classes. It is generally argued that looking to the large population of OBCs (52 per cent), recruitment of a few thousand OBCs every year against reserved vacancies is not going to produce any perceptible impact on their general

condition. On the other hand, the induction of a large proportion of employees against reserved vacancies will considerably impair the quality and efficiency of the government services. It is also stated that the benefits of such reservations will be skimmed off by those sections of OBCs which are already well off and the really backward sections will be left high and dry. Another argument advanced against this approach is that the policy of large scale reservations will cause great heart burning to those meritorious candidates whose entry into services will be barred as a result thereof.

All the above arguments are based on fairly sound reasoning. But these are also the arguments advanced by the ruling elite which is keen on preserving its privileges. Therefore, like all such reasoning, it is based on partisan approach. By the same token, while illuminating some immediate areas of concern it tends to ignore much larger issues of national importance.

It is not all our contention that by offering a few thousand jobs to OBC candidates we shall be able to make 52 per cent of the Indian population as forward. But we must recognise that an essential part of the battle against social backwardness is to be fought in the minds of the backward people. In India government service has always been looked upon as a symbol of prestige and power. By increasing the representation of OBCs in government services, we give them an immediate feeling of participation in the governance of this country. When a backward class candidate becomes a collector or a superintendent of palice, the material benefits accruing from his position are limited to the members of his family only. But the psychological spin off of this phenomenon is tremendous; the entire community of that backward class candidate feels socially elevated. Even when no tangible benefits flow to the community at large, the feeling that now it has its "own man" in the "corridors of power" acts as morale booster.

In a democratic set-up every individual and community has a legitimate right and aspiration to participate in ruling this country. Any situation which results in a near-denial of this right to nearly 52 per cent of the country's population needs to be urgently rectified.

Apprehensions regarding drop in the quality of government services owing to large scale induction of SC/ST and OBC candidates selected on merit turn out to be honest, efficient, hard-working and dedicated? At present, top echelons of all the government services are manned predominantly by open competition candidates and if the performance of our bureaucracy is any indication, it has not exactly covered itself with glory. Of course, this does not imply that candidates selected against reserved posts will do better. Chances are that owing to their social and cultural handicaps they may be generally a shade less competent. But, on the other hand, they will have the great advantage of possessing first hand knowledge of the sufferings and problems of the backward sections of society. This is not a small asset for field workers and policy makers ever at the highest level.

It is no doubt true that the major benefits of reservation and other welfare measures for Other Backward Classes will be cornered by the more advanced sections of the backward communities. But is not this a universal phenomenon? All reformist remedies have to contend with a slow recovery along the hierarchical gradient; there are no quantum jumps in social reform. Moreover, human nature being what it is, a 'new class' ultimately does emerge even in classless societies. The chief merit of reservation is not that it will introduce egalitarianism amongst OBCs when the rest of the Indian society is seized by all sorts of inequalities. But reservation will certainly erode the hold of higher castes on the services and enable OBCs in general to have a sense of participation in running the affairs of their country.

It is certainly true that reservation for OBCs will cause a lot of heart burning to others. But should the mere fact of this heart burning be allowed to operate as a moral veto against social reform. A lot of heart burning was caused to the British when they left India. It burns the hearts of all whites when the black protest against apartheid in South Africa. When the higher castes constituting less than 20 per cent of the country's population subjected the rest to all manner of social injustice, it must have caused a lot of heart burning to the lower castes. But now that the lower castes are asking

for a modest share of the national cake of power and prestige, a chorus of alarm is being raised on the plea that this will cause heart burning to the ruling elite. Of all the spacious arguments advanced against reservation for backward classes, there is none which beats this one about 'heart burning' in sheer sophistry.

Quantum and scheme of reservations

Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes constitute 22.5 per cent of the country's population. Accordingly, a pro-rata reservation of 22.5 per cent has been made for them in all services and public sector undertakings under the central government. In the states also, reservation for SCs and STs is directly proportional to their population in each state.

The population of OBCs both Hindu and non-Hindu, is around 52 per cent of the total population of India. Accordingly, 52 per cent of all posts under the central government should be reserved for them. But this provision may go against the law laid down in a number of Supreme Court judgments wherein it has been held that the total quantum of reservation under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution should be below 50 per cent. In view of this proposed reservation for OBCs would have to be pegged at a figure which, when added to 22.5 per cent for SCs and STs, remains below 50 per cent. In view of this legal constraint, the Commission is obliged to recommend a reservation of 27 per cent only, even though their population is almost twice this figure.

States which have already introduced reservation for OBCs exceeding 27 per cent, will remain unaffected by this recommendation.

With the above general recommendation regarding the quantum of reservation, the Commission proposes the following over-all scheme of reservation for OBCs.

*Candidates belonging to OBCs recruited on the basis of merit in an open competition should not be adjusted against their reservation quota of 27 per cent.

*The above reservation should also be made applicable to promotion quota at all level.

*Reserved quota remaining unfilled should be carried forward for a period of three years and dereserved thereafter.

*Relaxation in the upper age limit for direct recruitment should be extended to the candidates of OBCs in the same manner as done the case of SCs and STs.

*A roster system for each category of posts should be adopted by the concerned authorities in the same manner as presently done in respect of SC and ST candidates.

The above scheme of reservation in its toto should also be made applicable to all recruitment to public sector undertakings both under the central and state governments, as also to nationalised banks.

All private sector undertakings which have received financial assistance from the government in one form or the other should also be obliged to recruit personnel on the aforesaid basis.

All universities and affiliated colleges also be covered by the above scheme of reservation.

To give proper effect to these recommendations, it is imperative that adequate statutory provisions are made by the government to amend the existing enactments, rules, procedures, etc to the extent they are not in consonance with the same.

Educational concessions

Our educational system is elitist in character and results in a high degree of wastage and is least suited to the requirements of an over-populated and developing country. It is a legacy of the British rule which was severely criticised, during the independence struggle, and yet, it has not undergone any structural changes. Though it is least suited to the needs of backward classes, yet, they are forced to run the rat-race with others as no options are available to them. As 'educational reform' was not within the terms of reference of this Commission, we are also forced to tread the beaten track and suggest only the palliative measure within the existing framework.

Various state governments are giving a number of educational concessions to other backward class students like exemption of tuition fees, free supply of books and clothes, mid-day

meals, special hostel facilities stipends, etc. These concessions are all right as far as they go. But they do not go far enough. What is required is, perhaps, not so much the provision of additional funds as the framing of integrated schemes for creating the proper environment and incentives for serious and purposeful studies.

It is well known that most backward class children are irregular and indifferent students and their drop-out rate is very high. There are two main reasons for this. First, these children are brought up in a climate of extreme social and cultural deprivation and, consequently, a proper motivation for schooling is generally lacking. Secondly, most of these children come from very poor homes and their parents are forced to press them into doing small chores from a very young age.

Upgrading the cultural environments is a very slow process. Transferring these children to an artificially upgraded environment is beyond the present resources of the country. In view of this it is recommended that this problem may be tackled on a limited and selective basis on two fronts.

First, an intensive and time bound programme for adult education should be launched in selected pockets with high concentration of OBC population. This is a basic motivational approach as only properly motivated parents will take serious interest in educating their children. Secondly, residential schools should be set up in these areas for backward class students to provide a climate specially conducive to serious studies. All facilities in these schools including board and lodging, will have to be provided free of cost to attract students from poor and backward homes, separate government hostels for OBC students with the above facilities will be another step in the right direction.

As OBCs cannot afford the high wastage rates of our educational system, it is very important that their education is highly biased in favour of vocational training. After all reservation in services will absorb only a very small percentage of the educated backward classes and the rest should be suitably equipped with vocational skills to enable them to get a return on having invested several years in education.

It is also obvious that even if all the above facilities are

given to OBC students, they will not be able to compete on an equal footing with others in securing admission to technical and professional institutions. In view of this it is recommended that seats should be reserved for OBC students in all scientific technical and professional institutions run by the central as well as state governments. This reservation will fall under Article 15(4) of the Constitution and the quantum of reservation should be the same as in the government services, i.e. 27 per cent seats for OBC students will remain unaffected by this recommendation.

While implementing the provision for reservation it should also be ensured that the candidates who are admitted against the reserved quota are enabled to derive full benefit of higher studies. It has been generally noticed that these OBC students coming from an impoverished cultural background, are not able to keep abreast with other students. It is, therefore, very essential that special coaching facilities are arranged for all such students in our technical and professional institutions. The concerned authorities should clearly appreciate that their job is not finished once candidates against reserved quota have been admitted to various institutions.

Financial assistance

Vocational communities following hereditary occupations have suffered heavily as a result of industrialisation. Mechanism of backwardness is tackled at its root. Bulk of the small land-holders, tenants, agricultural labour, impoverished village artisans, unskilled workers, etc. belong to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. "Apart from social traditions, the dominance by the top peasantry is exercised through recourse to informal bondage which arises mainly through money-lending, leasing out of small bits of land and providing house-sites and dwelling space to poor peasants. As most of the functionaries of government are drawn from the top peasantry, the class and caste linkage between the functionaries of government and the top peasantry remain firm. This also tilts the socio-political balance in favour of the top peasantry and helps it in having its dominance over others".

It is the Commission's firm conviction that a radical transformation of the existing production relations is the most important single step that can be taken for the welfare and upliftment of all backward classes. Even if this is not possible in the industrial sector for various reasons, in the agricultural sector a change of this nature is both feasible and overdue.

The Commission, therefore, strongly recommends that all the state governments should be directed to enact and implement progressive land legislation so as to effect basic structural changes in the existing production relations in the countryside.

At present surplus land is being allotted to SCs and STs. A part of the surplus land becoming available in future as a result of the operation of land ceiling laws etc. should also be allotted to the OBC landless labour.

Central assistance

At present no central Assistance is available to any state government for implementing any welfare measures for other backward classes. The 18 states and union territories which have undertaken such measures have to provide funds from their own resources. During the Commission's tours practically every state government pointed out that unless the centre is prepared to liberally finance all special schemes for the upliftment of OBCs, it will be beyond the available resources of the states to undertake any worthwhile programme for the benefit of other backward classes.

The Commission fully shares the views of the state governments in this matter and strongly recommends that all development programmes specially designed for other backward classes should be financed by the central government in the same manner and to the same extent as done in the case of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

Regarding the period of operation of the Commission's recommendations, the entire scheme should be reviewed after 20 years. We have advisedly suggested this span of one generation at the raising of social consciousness is a

generational progress. Any review at a shorter interval would be rather arbitrary and will not give a fair indication of the impact of our recommendations on the prevailing status and life-styles of OBCs.

Reservation Quotas in Indian States

PERCENTAGE OF RESERVATION

<i>States</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>ST</i>	<i>OBC</i> <i>Govt. Edu.</i>		<i>Other Total</i>	
Andhra Pradesh	15	6	44	44	6	71
Haryana	20	—	5	5	—	—
Karnataka	15	3	35	33	15	68
Kerala	8	2	40	40	—	50
Madhya Pradesh	15	18	25*	25*	20	78
Maharashtra	13	7	10	10	4 Δ	34
Orissa	15	23	—	—	—	—
Punjab	25	—	5	5	—	—
Uttar Pradesh	25 \sim	2	15	15	—	41
Bihar	14	10	20	20	—	44
Gujrat	7	13	10**	10**	5	35
Tamil Nadu			30	30	20 Δ	68

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*Struckdown by High Court

**Extended to 28 and withdrawn

\sim Average of categories

△ More backward and denotified tribes

Source : Report of the Scheduled Caste and Tribes Commission 1986-87 ; Report of backward classes commission of central and the concerned states ; Relevant press clippings.

Mandal—man of many loyalties

Mr Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal was born in 1918 into a rich zamindari family in Saharsa district, Bihar. The youngest son of Mr Rashbehari Lal Mandal, he was a student of the Patna College. He began his public life as member of the Bhagalpur district board. He was elected to the Bihar Assembly as a Congress candidate from Madhepur in Saharsa district in 1952 and 1966.

In 1965, he dramatically crossed the floor from the Congress to the opposition in protest against the police atrocities in Pama village of his district. Mr Mandal then joined the Samyukta Socialist Party, led by Ram Manohar Lohia, and was made chairman of SSP state parliamentary board.

In 1967, he was elected to Parliament as a SSP candidates from Madhepura. Under pressure from his supporters, he became health minister in the United Front government in Bihar.

Dr Lohia, however was opposed to Mr Mandal's inclusion in the cabinet as was he an elected member of the Lok Sabha. In August 1967, Mr Mandal gave in to Lohia's pressure and resigned. But he never forgave the SSP.

Immediately after resigning, Mr Mandal formed the Soshit Dal and became leader of Soshit-Congress coalition in Bihar. In February 1968, despite constitutional objections raised by the United Front and dissident Congressmen, a five-member Soshit

Dal ministry headed by Mr Mandal was sworn in. Within 47 days, the Congress moved a no-confidence motion, defeating Mr Mandal's government. Mr Mandal then stood for Lok Sabha elections and won. In 1977, he was again elected to the Lok Sabha.

The backward classes commission was appointed by the Janata government in 1978 under the chairmanship of Mr Mandal. It submitted its report on December 31, 1980. Earlier in the year, on February 2, Mr Mandal resigned from the Janata Party. He announced his intentions of joining the Congress, saying "I want to co-operate with the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, in solving the problems of the country." But, while the Mandal commission report gathered dust, Mr Mandal himself dropped out of the political scene and lived in obscurity till his death on April 13, 1982, at the age of 64.

The Mandal commission was appointed by the former president, Mr Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, under article 340 of the constitution. Its members were Mr R.R. Bhole, MP, Mr Dewan Mohan Lal, Mr L.R. Naik, Mr K. Subramaniam with Mr S. Gill as secretary.

The terms of reference of the Commission were :

(i) to determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes.

(ii) to recommend steps to be taken for the advancement of the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens so identified.

(iii) to examine the desirability or otherwise of making provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of such backward classes of citizens which are not adequately represented in public services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of any state ; and

(iv) present to the President a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.

A countrywide socio-educational survey covering 405 out of 407 districts was conducted and 11 indicators for social and educational backwardness were derived. They were grouped under three broad heads, social, educational and economics, as follows :

SOCIAL (weightage of three points each)

- (i) castes/classes considered as socially backward by others.
- (ii) castes/classes which mainly depend on manual labour for their livelihood.
- (iii) castes/classes where at least 25 per cent females and 10 per cent males above the state average get married at an age below 17 years in rural areas and at least 10 per cent females and five per cent males do so in urban areas.
- (iv) castes/classes where participation of females in work at least 25 per cent above the state average.

EDUCATION (weightage of two points each)

- (v) castes/classes where the number of children in the age group of five—15 years who never attended school is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (vi) caste/classes where the rate of student dropout in the age group of five—15 years is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (vii) castes/classes amongst whom the proportion of matriculates is at least 25 cent below the state average.

ECONOMIC (weightage of one point each)

- (viii) castes/classes where the average value of family assets is at least 25 per cent below the state average.
- (ix) castes/classes where the number of families living in kucha houses is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (x) castes/classes where the source of drinking water is beyond half km for more than 50 per cent of the households.
- (xi) castes/classes where the number of households having taken consumption loan is at least 25 per cent above the state average.

The total value of all indicators add up to 22. All indicators were applied to all castes and those which scored 11 points or above were considered to be socially and educationally backward.

Courtesy : *Times of India Research Bureau.*

VP's appeal to Students

Following is the text of Prime Minister VP Singh's appeal to the nation last night :

In my more than two decades of political life, nothing has caused me more profound anguish than the decision of some young students to immolate themselves. I have sons not much older than these tragically misguided young people. Every such death is a personal blow to me.

On Tuesday I appealed to the students to enter into a dialogue for the third time, and for the third time they turned down my appeal. The first appeal was made at the all party meeting to discuss the implementation of the Mandal Commission report. I made the second appeal from Madras and the third on Tuesday in New Delhi.

I again urge the students to begin a dialogue. The goal of my government is to provide social justice, not to deprive anyone of employment opportunities. We are ready to discuss the problems of employment with the students and to find ways, jointly, of ensuring that employment opportunities are expanded, not restricted.

We are discussing this matter with our friendly parties on Wednesday and will take it up with other political parties in the next few days.

I am prepared to take any step, consistent with the basic need for social justice, to dispel the fears, and mollify the feelings of those sections of the youth who are apprehensive about their future.

I ask you, the youth of India, not to entertain these fears. Your interest is uppermost in my mind. I ask you for trust and patience. I ask you to join me in building a better future.

I understand that there have been demands for my resignation from some quarters. I wish to reassure my party and the millions who believe in what I am doing that I have no intention to shirk the responsibility that has been cast on me. But I also wish to make it clear, that should a situation arise in which I have to choose between a cause that I believe in so intensely, and my chair, I will not hesitate for an instant to choose the former.

It would be easy for me to offer concessions or make compromises, as many well wishers have urged me to do. I have considered their advice and am grateful for it, but I cannot barter away the aspirations of the deprived, simply to retain my chair.

In this year of social justice, it gives me profound satisfaction that the National Front government has been able to bring a glimmer of hope to the eyes of those who have known only social oppression for centuries. We have opened a small door to give them a share in shaping the destiny of the nation. That door cannot be closed again. Future governments, no matter how much they hedge or dither, will never be able to take away what has been given.

Let us come together and work out the concrete steps that we need to take to offer them a better, more secure, future, and to build a just social order.

Text of SC ruling on Mandal

The following is the text of the supreme court order on Mandal Commission case :

“There out of us sitting as a bench on the September 21, 1990, made an order hearing parties where we had indicated that the decision to implement three aspects of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission was a political one and ordinarily the court would not interfere with such a decision.

This is what we had said there. “Lot of emphasis has been laid on either side on the human factor. It was particularly brought to our notice that subsequent to the order of September 11, 1990, agitation has spread into every nook and corner of the country and public life has been disturbed, human live have been lost and government property has been damaged and destroyed. While we take notice of it, we are of the view that there is no particular necessity for judicial interference on that sole ground.”

Thereafter, we had made an appeal to the entire nation that the matter was being adjudicated by this court and everybody's rights would be worked out when the matter is heard and nothing shall impede this court from working out the rights of parties and giving such relief as is ultimately adjudicated to be due.

This petition on behalf of the Supreme Court Bar Association has been brought up by high lighting incidents which have taken place after that order was made.

We have heard learned counsel on either side at considerable length. We have also listened to interveners and parties in person.

The learned attorney general had told us on the earlier occasion that identification of castes would take about two to three months. It is not in dispute that until such identification is made, no further steps for conferring benefits contained in the government's order dated August 31, 1990 can at all be worked out.

At the counsel's request of all parties, we prepone the hearing of the matters from November 6, 1990 to October 25, 1990. We are of the view that till the end of November there would be no occasion for proceeding with the implementation of the government order excepting identification of the castes to be benefited.

In fact, the real implication of the order of September 21, 1990 was that there was nothing going to happen before the matter was heard by this court. We would, however, reiterate without taking into consideration the submissions with reference to the happenings after the September 21, that the identification of the castes shall continue but until the matter is heard and we expect it to be finished before the end of the year, no further steps should be taken. No other steps to implement the order of August 13, 1990 shall be taken.

The earlier order relating to recruitment of doctors by UPSC is left unaffected as the question of reservation shall not arise until after the written examination.

We make it clear that we expect that law and order situation shall immediately improve, both parties shall take our appeal seriously and restore peace so that the hearing of the matter can be taken up by this court in an appropriate atmosphere.

We reiterate that the legitimate interest of every backward class shall be appropriately protected. We make it further clear that the order made today is only a clarification of the order made on September 21, 1990 bringing out the real

purport. Learned attorney general in course of his submissions has clarified that prevailing benefits of reservation for the handicapped have not been affected by the government order.

All the interlocutory applications for intervention filed till today shall be accepted by the registry.

The full text of our order shall be immediately released to the press and the government controlled media for the purpose of transmission to the public at large.

Study shows 1051 backward classes

As the row over the number of backward communities listed by the Mandal commission continues, a just-concluded study by the Anthropological Survey of India was identified 1051 backward classes in the country.

(The Mandal commission has listed more than three thousand communities as socially and educationally backward).

The objective of the project, launched in 1985, was of course different from that of the mandal commission. It was to generate brief descriptive anthropological profile of all communities of India, the impact of change and development process on them and the linkage that bring them together.

¶The study, free from political overtones, is expected to enrich knowledge on the sociological pattern of the country.

Explaining the necessity of such a project, the director general of ASI, Mr K. S. Singh, told newsmen in an interview that there existed a large information gap about a very large number of communities of India, or the information that was there was scanty and needed to be updated.

The project was also in accordance with the objective of A.S.I. which has been pursuing bio-cultural researches among

different population groups since its inception 45 years ago, Mr Singh said. The ASI's objective, had been redefined in the policy resolution adopted in 1985 which committed it to the survey of "the human surface of India" he said.

The ASI has been able to identify, locate and write on 4384 communities, including scheduled castes, 443, scheduled tribes, 426, backward classes, 1051 and other communities.

"We have been able to prepare probably the most comprehensive lists of communities with all their ramifications such as subgroups, divisions, clans, lineages, surnames and titles." Mr. Singh said.

The ASI is releasing its data called "People of India" tomorrow for scrutiny and further discussion. As the data is still being analysed it will not be appropriate to mention any findings conclusively, he said.

However, a few trends in the analysis of the data could be shared tentatively, Mr Singh said.

—The study reveals the strength and continuity of regional identities which go back to the prehistoric times, in terms of morphological and genetic characteristics of populations, language and literature, material culture, food habits, rituals, folklore, local forms of religion, fairs and festivals etc. These regional identities are primarily secular, according to the study.

The communities, no matter how ranked they are, share the regional space and ethos. This explains why about 80-90 per cent of the communities of India are within the boundaries of Indian states and union territories, which were-organised on the basis of language. These are thus linguistic-cultural and social identities, largely homogenous.

Only about 10 per cent of communities are spread over more than one state or adjoining area of states. They consist of traders, merchants, artisans, minorities and so on.

There are few communities which do not consider themselves migrants. Every community recalls its migration in its folklore and history, set off by famines, wars, political and sheer necessity.

The whole of India is a kshetra, and a Indian is a migrant per excellence. The immigrants accepted regional ethos. Their role in promoting the development of regional languages and literature, building economy is well known, the study emphasises.

History will curse you

**IF YOU FAIL TO REALISE WHAT YOU ARE !
DR. M. KARUNANIDHI'S APPEAL TO
YOUNG GENERATION OF INDIA
IN HIS COLUMNS—'MURASOLI' – TAMIL DAILY**

Dear Brethren,

Those bereft of basic rights are today demanding that these be restored to them—by those who snatched it away. It is only “justice” that the usurpers return these rights, without rancour or anger. That would be fair, just and righteous !

A rich man, out on his morning stroll, comes upon some rupee coins lying on the street, he picks them up and pockets them. A poor man who lost these coins, through his torn shirt pocket, now asks the rich man to return them. The rich man, with a kind heart should return them to his unfortunate brother—if he is kind hearted !

Three travellers board a train, having purchased their tickets. The train being over crowded, they are unable to find seats. Then, they see a man, stretched out on a seat meant for four, fast asleep and snoring. They wake him up and tell him : “Sir the sleeping traveller was a civilised person he should oblige—and all four could continue their journey, in comfort. But,

if he was not a civilised person, he would flare at them : “Who are you to disturb me ? I have been occupying this seat before you. Go away ! There is no place for you.”

Brethren

like the **kind hearted wealthy man,**

Like the **considerate traveller** who accommodated his fellow-men : those who have enjoyed high positions and status in education and administration in our country, should now be sensitive and responsive to the recommendations of the Mandal Commission—and not mindlessly oppose it in such a vehement manner !

But

If they, like him who thinks that the coins found on the road should only fill his pockets, and like him—who feels that he has every right to usurp a whole seat to himself while other fellow travellers remain standing—then, they are like those who have enjoyed all opportunities, social and economic status all these years—and now imagine that their future is doomed, and therefore oppose, tooth and nail, the Mandal Commission recommendations, being brought forward, the V.P. Singh led National Front Government.

Whether such a stand is “just”, let them honestly examine, as per the dictates of their own conscience, as per the “faith” that they so repeatedly profess to follow !

Today, in states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka reservation in education and job opportunities has been in existence for a number of years. Even during the regime of Thiru Morarji Desai, when Thiru Charan Singh’s efforts resulted in the appointment of the Mandal Commission to bring into implementation the reservation of 27% for backward class and 22½% for Scheduled Caste/Tribes which has been in existence for Central Government employees—**but only in theory and not in practice !**

This was then put to the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1980. But, for ten years of the Indira regime and the subsequent Rajiv regime, the Mandal Recommendations,

meant to benefit the backward/scheduled castes and tribes all over India, was **consigned to the wastepaper basket !**

Now, the National Front Government, as promised in its Election Manifesto, led by Thiru V.P. Singh, has come forward to implement the Mandal Commission recommendation.

Even if we consider, just one point of the Mandal Commission recommendations, we would clearly understand just how unfair the opportunities have been to Backward Class, Scheduled Castes and Tribes in Central Government employment :

***The number of Class I Officers in the Central Government, Finance Department is 1008. If $22\frac{1}{2}\%$ had been reserved for SC/ST—then the number employed should have been 227. But only 66 have been appointed.**

***If 27% had been reserved for Backward Classes, then 272 should have been appointed. But now, only one has been appointed!**

Out of 1008 jobs in this one department itself, **the upper class has already secured 941 jobs.**

Dear Brethren

Isn't this single point outlined in the Mandal Commission enough? The Revolutionary Poet Bharatidasan has rightly said :

**“Those who climbed while others slept,
Now attempt to scare them to silence !”**

“Come youngsters, let us join together and create an atmosphere to dialogue. Let us build a future, more bright, more promising and more secure, by taking the right steps today. Let us seek social justice for one and all.” This was the appealing call given by our Prime Minister Thiru V.P. Singh to the youth.

The misguided youth, instigated by power brokers and autocrats with vested interests—should not be led astray to ignore this appeal. They should realise the truth, as said by **Mahakavi Bharati.**

“Every one of you—is king, in this land !”

Instead of opposing the genuine efforts by the National Front Government, to create “Social Justice”, they should

support and strengthen it—otherwise—like the rich gentleman who tried to pocket the poor man's coins,—like the adamant traveller who insisted on usurping the seat meant for four—entirely for himself, the Indian youth will be cursed by history to become mere puppets in the hands of autocratic power brokers.

Let this state of affairs not fall on the youth !

Brethren,

I implore through you, to stave off this curse !

Yours affectionately,
(M. KARUNANIDHI)

Issued by the D.M.K. party, Anna Arivalayam, Madras.

Around the Places

LEADERLESS STIR INTENSIFIES

The mob fury which is sweeping the face of north India seems to be merely gathering momentum 10 days after the first rabid upper class group took to the streets. The agitation's significance however, lies in the fact that it remains well-orchestrated even though leaderless. The surge of fury seems to be feeding on its own dynamism, be it Delhi University, Aurangabad or Gorakhpur.

PATNA

Notwithstanding the shoot-at-sight orders issued by the authorities in the wake of the anti-reservation stir, violence and arson continue unabated as rampaging groups of upper caste youth vent their anger over the decision to implement the Mandal report.

Police firing in the Jhanjharpur assembly constituency, which is former chief minister Jagannath Mishra's pocket borough, in which one anti-reservationist was killed, and the score of lathi charges in Sasaram have not dampened the anti-reservationists' fervour.

Their fury, which has left in its wake a trail of destruction, has according to estimates, caused a loss of Rs. 40 crore, of which the railways, which have largely borne the brunt of the mob hysteria, is the loser by more than Rs. 30 crore.

The stage seems to be set for a prolonged period of civil strife in the state as the government, particularly the chief minister, shows no sign of attempting to dismount from the populist bandwagon. Laloo Prasad Yadav's steadfast stance was conveyed to the Prime Minister. The chief minister was reportedly alarmed by the rumours doing the rounds that V. P. Singh is under considerable pressure from his parliamentary allies to reduce the percentage of reservations he has mooted for the economically weak section. The government's expectations of the agitation dying a slow death are belied by the momentum the stir seems to have gathered as it sweeps across the state. It had initially been confined to the state capital and pockets of north Bihar, but is fast spreading to south Bihar.

On Thursday, a bandh was observed in Dhanbad, a stronghold of the coal mafia and Janata Dal MLA Sarajdeo Singh, who is known to be close to Chandra Shekhar. Demonstrations were held in Hazaribagh and Giridih, and the trouble has also spread to Nawada and Aurangabad districts.

As bizzare sidelight of the agitation was the death of a panicstricken passenger who jumped off a running train when the anti-reservationists threw petrol bombs at it. In Kashichak, a railway station was set on fire.

The anti-reservationists gave sufficient notice of their intention by hurling bombs close to Gandhi Maidan where the chief minister was hoisting the national flag at a well-attended Independence Day function. It was almost as if the agitationists had synchronised their watches with the chief minister's for the sound of the explosions coincided with Yadav's impassioned plea for peace.

In the evening, a 500-strong mob attempted to storm the office of the senior superintendent of police to secure the release of two of their comrades. One of them, Manoj Lal Das, is a leading activist of the Chhatra Janata, and had been arrested when he and another boy were trying to immolate themselves.

The administration is reportedly flummoxed by the spontaneity of the agitation, and its steady escalation, even though it lacks a well-defined leadership.

Meanwhile, the situation in village Padesa in Vaishal district

was described as tense. The Rajputs have started to trickle into the lengthening rows of anti-reservationists, and the large numbers of Rajputs who took part in demonstrations in Aurangabad, Chhapra, Sonapur and Karisath in Bhojpur district were an indication of the declining appeal Prime Minister V.P. Singh has for them.

DELHI

Delhi University is convulsed by a students movement unprecedented in its rather unevenful history. And a totally a political and leaderless one at that. The anti-reservation agitation has snowballed from the core group of 25 post-graduate hostelers who had gathered after dinner for a brainstorming session on the issue to involve almost the entire university.

Each demonstration has been attended by increasing numbers of students — the torchlight procession that wended its way from Maurice Nagar Chowk to the Mall Road on Tuesday had as many as 3,000 participants.

What is remarkable about the movement is its spontaneity and the fact that it has attracted students from all over the campus, including those who ordinarily keep aloof from all "trouble."

The enthusiasm that the stir has generated in institutions like St Stephen's College and the Delhi School of Economics, the students of which usually do not involve themselves in such movements, has come in as a morale booster for the agitationists. Also unprecedented is the widening support base the movement is finding in the isolated South Campus.

The modes of protest so far have been dramatic and have caught the imagination of the public at large — burning copies of degrees, torchlight processions at dusk, getting a safai karamchari to unfurl the tricolour at Maurice Nagar Chowk (renamed "Kranti Chowk" by the students) on Independence day. If the anti-Mandal Commission Forum members are to be believed, the karamcharis of the university, many of whom, belong to the backward classes, are actively supporting the stir.

While the teachers are by and large supportive of the strike, the DUTA president, M. M. P. Singh, has invited the wrath of the agitationists with his statement that the movement is bound

to be short-lived as it is restricted to "hostelers and Biharis."

"What nonsense ! Can the Delhi University hostels accommodate 5,000 students ? If it helps matters, we are willing to stand under our state banners and show Mr. Singh how wide our support base is," reacted an incensed activist.

However, Singh is quite confident that the effervescence will fizzle out as quickly as it had burgeoned. "The movement will throw the education system off the rails here too, as it did in Bihar, and then where will these career-seekers be ?"

Students are livid at parallels being drawn between their efforts and the agitation in Bihar. One of the characteristics of the movement which they are proud of and which the police corroborate, is the absence of violence. The three companies of police maintaining vigil at the university have had little on their hands so far.

The agitation has also hopelessly caught off-guard major political student groups of the university. Though elections are round the corner, the National Students Union of India (NSUI) and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) are yet floundering between the demands of their political affiliations and the growing student support for the stir.

Forum members insist that they have received feelers from political parties which they spurned and that some of the more enthusiastic student union leaders have resigned from their posts to join the group.

LUCKNOW

Though the anti-reservation stir has been steadily gathering momentum in Uttar Pradesh the administration remains confused about the implementation of the report.

Close on the heels of the formation of Arakshan Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti in Gorakhpur last week, the Mandal Ayog Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti has been formed here under the leadership of Satyendra Panday. The new outfit is busy enlisting support from high-caste Hindu students of local colleges. The Samiti, which claims that its rally would be addressed by kisan leader Mahendra Singh Tikait, plans to gherao the chief minister. Samiti leaders have fanned out in the

state to mobilise support amongst lawyers, teachers, bureaucrats and other sections of the society.

The leadership of the movement is once again in the hands of Brahmin youth. Though equally affected by the Mandal report, Thakur youth have not been in the forefront of the stir perhaps due to the V.P. Singh factor. Still, there has been trouble in Varanasi's Uday Pratap College, the bastion of Kshatriya scholarship.

The stir is gaining momentum faster in the eastern part of the state, adjacent to Bihar. Gorakhpur university, its affiliated colleges and schools have been closed for three days till August 19. In Varanasi too, all educational institutions have been closed.

Gonda and Barabanki in central UP too have been affected. In Barabanki, students blockaded the Lucknow-Faizabad national highway and damaged several vehicles.

Mathura in western UP witnessed a four-hour-long "rasta roko" by students on roads leading to Delhi and Agra.

The North-Eastern Railway general manager has claimed damage worth crores of rupees.

Reported by Amit Kumar (Patna) Malini Nair (Delhi) and Rajiv Saxena (Lucknow).

Courtesy : Independent.

Why do kids burn for Mandal?

CHANDRIKA MAGO
VIJAY JUNG THAPA

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI, October 14.

In 25 days since Rajeev Goswami went up in flames, the Capital has seen 12 more ripple-effect immolations. What drove the students to it? Are they being instigated? Did they lose all hope? What kind of background do they come from?

Detailed discussions, spread over 10 hours, with the families of seven of those who tried to, or did commit, self-immolation revealed several common factors. These are: an ordinary family, perhaps not in financial difficulties, but certainly not well-off, mainly lower-middle class, youngsters who are studying, or had studied, in government schools, academically average, and boys and girls who did not let out what they were feeling, or perhaps their parents did not have the time. Therefore, the grief now is mixed with puzzlement. Why did someone they knew so well suddenly decide to go up in flames?

The Mandal atmosphere, families of five students said as much. Students were aware of it, even if they did not know

what the Mandal commission was all about, However, these students were not actively involved in the agitation. The same cannot be said of the first two who attempted self-immolation —Rajeev Goswami and Surinder Singh Chauhan.

The family of Abhay Singh Tomar, who died, sits stunned in a dingy little room at Nangloi. Abhay' elder brother, Ajay, squats on a dhurrie going through his brother's certificates again and again. A redeyed Meenakshi, a student of Jesus and Mary College and the eldest child in the family, sits silently beside him.

The father, Mr. G.S. Tomar, has had a hard life. Forced to drop out of his engineering course due to un-avoidable circumstances. he later did a diploma course in fire engineering. A series of jobs followed in Badauni, Assam, Nepanagar and Indore.

Finally in 1987, he went to Agra and briefly prospered with a confectionery business till a short absence from work proved disastrous. His employees had vanished with all his money. Defeated, he came to Delhi and go a job with a desultory, and finally, no salary.

Things had only started looking up recently for the past couple of months, Mr. Tomar, after a struggle with his conscience, has been accepting money for his homoeopathic treatment, "Abhay used to be happy when he saw I had earned Rs. 150-200 a day. The teenager may have been influenced by the newspapers and TV," he says speaking of the glorification of self-immolation attempts. That could have been true of 14-year old Rakesh Kashyap, too.

Rakesh, who is now battling for life, used to be glued to the TV during the news bulletins. Mr Urmila Kashyap, his mother, said he is quiet, didn't go out much, read the newspapers'. But we never discussed reservations and had no idea he was going to do something like this", adds his mother, who works as a clerk in the NDMC. "But he talked a lot about Rajeev Goswami," said his cousin, one of the many with whom he used to spend time.

His parents would have had little time to notice subtle changes, if any in his attitude. With their two children,

Rakesh and his younger sister, Mamta, they have their Trilok-puri house early in the morning. Depositing the children with their maternal grandparents, they make their way to the NDMC where both work. The children then go on to school and come back to spend the afternoons with their cousins. They used to go back late in the evening with their parents. "Average boy", is what his school principal has to say of him.

And average is probably how 13-year-old Chetan Gautam would have been described. Now, a framed photograph with the words, "*Shaheed, chetan gautam*", adorns one wall of the small dark-room in the Shakarpur house. "Endearing, helpful, outgoing and intelligent", is how his parents now describe him.

Mr Sarvesh Gautam, the father, is a frustrated man. Initial attempts at studying commerce having failed, and unable to get a typist's job, this man from Mathura made his way to the Capital in the early '70s. His family joined him seven years ago and he was plying an auto-rickshaw. He gave that up to start a garment export business, which did not go off too well. Now he is a film agent and is frequently on tour.

Regret is all that 18-year-old Suman Lal Garg's family is left with. Sitting in the cramped four-room Trinagar flat, which houses three families, her uncle, Mr Anand Kumar Jain, speaks of his late niece. Suman had been living with him for ten years in this rented house. Her parents, sister and brother had just come two years ago from Hissar, where the family had a sweetmeat shop. Here her father works with a property dealer and the mother in a factory.

Monika Chadha, 19, has five sisters. The motive of the first girl to attempt self-immolation is not too clear. Her mother is too upset to talk and her father, Mr Gulshan Chadha, is unsure about details. He says he has seen the death of four of his children. His youngest daughter died two years ago in a road accident.

Monika, who had come from Hissar five years ago, initially joined a government school—to help her to gradually adjust to city life, her father explained. For some unexplained reason, she left and is now doing class XII by correspondence.

Mr Chadha, who runs his antique business from the same big hall in which the family lives in Greater Kailash, claims he is a self-made man. A supporter of the Congress, he claims is an active social worker. His family having migrated during the partition to Hissar. He is the product of a government school.

Both Rajeev, the only son among seven children, and 26-year-old Surinder, a Central government employee, were from lower middle-class families, Rajeev' father, Mr Madan Lal Goswami, is a postmaster at Andrews Ganj. His mother, Mrs Nandrani, works in a pharmaceutical firm at Okhla.

Surinder's father is a retired government employee and his mother died when he was a toddler. His elder brother, Manohar, who brought up Surinder is a stenographer with the Central government.

Rajeev is in his final year in college and Surinder was attending evening classes in the Dayal Singh College.

What course Rajeev is doing in college is something his parents don't seem to have felt the need to know. His college life, said his father, was completely separate from his home life. All that he wants his children to remember is that the family honour comes foremost. His mother refers to him as her "lathi" (support) in old age.

So what drove them to do it? The parents themselves seem perplexed. Perhaps the general atmosphere, with which Dr Devendra Mohan, the head of the psychiatry department at the AIIMS, concurs. Once the media stops dramatising it, this ripple-effect will disappear fast.

Courtesy : *Times of India.*

‘Reservations will stay till there is equity’

DILEEP PADGAONKAR *interviews*
VISHWANATH PRATAP SINGH

No adversity will prevent Vishwanath Pratap Singh from using his spell in office to reorder Indian politics and society along radically different lines: neither the rumblings within his own party, nor the growing impatience within the BJP and the CPM—the two parties supporting this government from the outside—nor the aggressiveness of the Congress nor the disillusionment of those intellectuals who had hailed him barely a year ago as a messiah, nor even the wrath and despair of the young who have taken to the streets to protest against his decision on Mandal. Armed with the conviction that he is destined to fulfill a historical mission, he is determined to go about the task by deploying his uncommon political instincts and his formidable tactical skills against his real and potential adversaries. This lonely, intensely introspective Prime Minister, whose personal integrity is above all reproach even in the eyes of his bitterest critics, is an altogether bizarre figure; one who conveys the impression that he is at one and the same time driven by fate yet hunted by events and forces he is unable to control. There is something pathological about his sense

of commitment to what he believes is his mission ; alongside, however, he also exudes an equally powerful sense of detachment.

The presence of both the yogi and the commissar in Vishwanath Pratap Singh makes it difficult to understand the working of his mind. He manages at all times to be elusive, enigmatic, self abnegating, doughty confident and touchy to the extreme. This much became all too obvious in the course of a 90-minute conversation with the Prime Minister held aboard the special IAF aircraft bringing him back to Delhi last Sunday after a two-day visit to the south. The week that has passed since the conversation took place has been his most trying period in office. What he has to say helps to better understand his conduct during the crisis ; resolute to the point of being obstinate, he is determined to single-handedly take on all adverse force regardless of the cost to himself or to the nation.

Dileep Padgaonkar ; Your decision to implement the Mandal commission report has polarised opinion in the country as nothing else has since Independence. Some hail you as a messiah of the backward classes ; some others do not hesitate to compare you with Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Those constituencies which were with you at the time of your election have now become alienated from you. Do you agree with this overall assessment ?

V.P. Singh : No. We have not lost our large support. Only we have advised our supporters to be restrained so that conflict does not flare up. As a matter of caution we have advised them very strongly not to come out in the open when the government itself is taking steps. There is support for Mandal in the south ; the support in the north is no less.

How then do you explain the violent reaction to your decision in the north ?

The media has been giving a one-sided verdict. If the press does not believe in something it is perfectly free to say so. I have never criticised the press so far and I never will. I believe in freedom of the press not by announcing it, but by practising it. Today, too, I practise it.

But the press should present the other side. The fact that we have gone about this (implementation of the Mandal report) in a cautious way has not been reported by the media. Neither has the fact that the Congress has got into the act : the NSUI, for example. or the Congress MLAs in Bihar doing it openly. An issue becomes socially volatile when there is only one sort of projection by the media. We would not have had this expression of passion if there had been a more balanced projection. Anyway, basically the reaction is confined to Delhi and Haryana.

Apart from the Press some political parties have also been very critical.

Basically it is the NSUI and the Congress in Bihar.

But the BJP and the CPM have also been critical, at least as regards the manner in which you announced the decision.

Well, Mandal is an old issue. It has been debated. We have been giving notice for the past three years that we were going to implement it in the first year that we came to power. We said so in our manifesto in the President's speech, in my assurance to the house, at every party meeting, at the meeting of our parliamentary party. Everyone has been so vociferous the implementation. So there has been no lack of notice. There was no surprise about it.

In retrospect do you feel that the ground could have been better prepared ?

We have been preparing the ground for years and years. The fact that it (the decision on the Mandal report) has such wide support shows that the ground was prepared. Why don't you look at the national picture ? The southern states, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, the whole of the north-east : is there no support ? There is no problem in Gujarat. In Orissa, too, there is no problem now. There is major support in U.P. and Bihar. The problem is confined only to Delhi and Haryana.

Why do you think the intelligentsia has not been able to appreciate your move ? It has by and large gone along with reservation for the SCs and STs.

I don't think they have gone along with it. They have not accepted it in their hearts. But assuming that they have, it is for them to introspect on how and why they have changed. They raised an objection when reservations for the educationally and socially backward classes were made in many states—in some cases several decades ago. But very serious objections are raised by opinion makers when I try and implement the same policy. Is that intellectual honesty? If they were honest they ought to have said all along that what the states have been practising was wrong. But they never did. Now they turn against the Centre even when it has taken so many precautions. We have said that one should go ahead with the implementation only on the basis of what is accepted by a state. In fact at the Centre we want to do something far less than what the states have done. So why is the intelligentsia so violently against us?

Is it because of the feeling that the so-called backward classes already have a very big stake in the political structure as well as in the economic structure in the countryside?

Since when have they come up in a big way? It is only after the National Front came to power that you hear this complaint that backward classes have acquired all this clout. This is the one chance they have got come up. And they are being robbed of it.

But surely there must be sound reasons why the previous government did not implement the report even partially?

They did not want these groups to come up politically. It is as simple as that.

Is there any reason why you have not commented on the students taking to the streets in Delhi and elsewhere in such a big way?

What to do? Everybody is inciting them. It is not their fault.

You think they are being incited.

Yes.

But don't you feel it will be a good move to at least talk to them?

It is not a question of talking to them. Do you know the full case of the first boy who tried to burn himself? I should not like to say anything more on the subject at this stage.

With your decision on Mandal you appear to have changed the very parameters of Indian politics. We don't know yet what this change will mean. But you have forced every political party to redefine itself. Would you go along with this view?

We have very clearly spoken about transformation through equity. We have said again and again that we will bring equity as the central theme of national politics. This was one of our objectives. Somehow we were not taken seriously.

In recent years the state of the nation has been reduced to statistics, to growth data. But statistics do not reveal relationships between various productive forces and between the various sections of society. Nor do they show how growth rates get distributed. Given the heterogeneous nature of our political, economic and social structure we can avoid the question of equity only to the peril of our national unity. If the question is avoided, sooner or later, the issue of equity is going to hit us so hard that we shall not know how to react.

Therefore our agenda is to look at the issue. The agenda does not relate necessarily to the treasury of the government where you are naturally confined by the available resources. Take the national integration council or the inter-state councils. These can provide yardsticks to political equity in various spheres: equity between communities, between regions, between the centre and the state. Our commitment is to federalism, to panchayat decentralisation to electoral reforms, to autonomy for TV and radio, to the right to information, to the modification of the Official Secrets Act.

As for social equity, take the steps the government has taken as regards the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, land reforms (place in the Ninth Schedule), right to work, the Mandal commission. We have also taken steps regarding the minorities. We want greater involvement of youth through the national youth councils the elimination of illiteracy, involvement of farmers (Sharad Joshi is working on this), the creation of a women's council. We want 30 per cent reservation for women in panchayats.

By 'involvement' of these sections, I presume you mean not dole, but a place for them in the power structure.

Yes, I do not promise heaven. I do not promise a palace. My concept is as follows : Even if it is a hut it must be your home. Your house may be small but you are entitled to share it. A family is not sustained by its wealth. A family is family because of love and justice. And we are able to impart this sense of family (to the oppressed). This is a process of giving a place to them (in the power structure). None of this will get reflected in budgets or data. What the National Front government is attempting to do is something much more powerful.

What you are attempting to do, in substance, is to radically change attitudes and values. But the attendant risks are surely great.

Certainly the risks are great. We are ready take them. The steps we have taken to bring about greater equity on the political and economic fronts are powerful measures and certainly they will provoke powerful responses. We can't give doles or provide government jobs to all, our resources do not allow for this. But within the available resources we shall plant the seed ling. For the first time since Independence, employment has become the hub of our planning.

What will the right to work involve ?

Within the resources available, it will mean some sort of an employment guarantee. Who can't attempt to give doles or guarantee a government job. But we have to provide work to anyone who wants it.

Will these employment guarantee schemes also be considered on the basis of reservation ?

No. They will benefit mainly the poor.

Do you expect any turmoil on this score ?

Not for the right to work. But there will be some turmoil on labour participation in management and also on the policy on farmers. There will be lobbies against them.

Are you not running grave political risks by attempting to overhaul attitudes and values on your narrow electoral base ?

No one has achieved anything without risks. We have come up through struggle. As I see it, I have to carry out the struggle in government. If I had to choose between the struggle and the government it would not take me a split second to choose struggle. Because if you give up the struggle and stay in your chair, it will become an electric chair where you face a certain, collective death. And that will be your end. If you stick to your struggle, chair or no chair, you also live forever. See what happened to the Congress : it became a mere government. It no longer remained a movement. It remained in power. But then it died.

When were you convinced that the spirit of the movement had evaporated in the Congress ?

I think the watershed came with the emergency. The Congress became status quoist.

And yet you continued to be in the party for many, many years afterwards.

Yes. (Pause). The psychology was the resolution of power, not change. When we try to get into the trap of trying to retain power at all costs not only will the government be shot dead, but our political life itself will be shot dead.

Prime Minister. I fear that the very powerful forces you are unleashing will make it very difficult for you to function.

They will as they did when I was in the finance ministry. I am very clear about this. There are forces operating within and outside the government. Still, I have got quite a bit of support within the government and also in the National Front.

On the communal issue you had once said not long before you were elected Prime Minister that you would not allow anyone to harm the emotional fabric of the country. On Ayodhya we seem to be heading towards a confrontation. What price are you willing to pay on this issue ?

No price is too big to pay preserve the emotional integrity of the country. But nationalism and patriotism are requisites of emotional unity. We have, however, to reckon with the fact that politics has become transactional. The argument runs like this : I will give you this or that benefit provided you give me your vote. To my mind, the question is not what

anyone can give to the other but what we all can give to the country. Consider this; if polarisation starts taking place on religious lines, won't we give a first-class agreement to the secessionists in Punjab and Kashmir? Will we not also ignite the fires of secessionisms in the north-east where Christians are in a sizeable number? Secularism is the rock foundation of our unity and integrity. There is no other.

We have so many faiths and beliefs. It is not for nothing that Gandhiji and other leaders of the nation held that secularism and democracy were partners. We have to seriously debate this issue, to put it in proper focus. I mean, if someone commits a mistake in an election, he can correct it in five years. But if emotional integrity is shattered, it will take five generations to repair it.

On the issue of secularism everyone, save a couple of parties, would agree with you.

I do not wish to think in terms of parties on this issue. The integrity of the country is not a monopoly of the parties; it is a matter of concern to every common citizen. Parties cannot appropriate the country. Take all the parties and all their members, including the bogus ones. They do not add up to even one-tenth of the population. Are the other 90 per cent dumb? Should they not have rights? No one should shift an inch on the issue of secularisation.

All the same the parties are privileged channels of political communication.

That is what we should try to change. We should try to build on what Jayaprakashji (Jayaprakash Narayan) championed: *Lok shakti* (people's power). Apart from *paksh* (party) and *vipaksh* (opposition party) there is the *janpaksh* (party of the people). The democratic process has to be extended to the daily experience of people, to places where people participate in managing themselves. Therefore, our emphasis on decentralisation.

Why are you taking on so many things with far-reaching implications? I am sure you have given some thought to the perils and dangers.

I am very clear about the dangers. I have consciously taken the decision to risk those dangers. One is the matter of

your credibility with the people after you have made a commitment to them. We have gone about this very systematically. Our manifesto is the basic document of this government. The bureaucracy knows it ; every minister knows it. We have put all our manifesto items on a monitoring grid. We know where each item stands at a given point in time. Various steps and even sub-steps are clearly laid down to attain a particular goal. Alongside with the monitoring, we also process each item to move ahead : to prepare the bills, to turn them into enactments. When we swing forward some bill, it looks as if it is a sudden act. It is not. Several months have gone into its preparation : consultations, interaction, legal formulations and so on. We want legislation to get out fast so we can spend the rest of the time implementing it.

I have developed this technique which is also part of my nature. The process consists of first setting goals, then deadlines, followed by a great deal of interaction. We do all the necessary preparation, going into each step minutely. After doing all this you can push quite a bit in a short time.

The peculiar thing is what I do is being suspected. They say it is on account of a mid-term poll. We want to reverse this: you do not do something for the people when the polls are round the corner but when the polls are far, far away, Memories of what we do might not remain by the time the poll comes. But if we are sincere we must do something for the people even without keeping polls in mind.

Are you planning a strategic shift on the economic front as well ?

We have to give a push in that direction. Because if the cake is not there, what will you distribute ? Equity is meaningless without growth.

How do you expect to give the push ?

In this matter you have to take cognisance of Indian reality as well as the world situation. Our largest is our manpower. On the other hand, the world economy is fast integrating. We can't remain aloof from it. It represents the challenge of modernisation and competition.

Our biggest challenge is how to marry the two : manpower with an integrated world economy. We will not get any set

answers. We will have to evolve our own answers taking into account Indian reality. We have sought to do this since Independence. Nehruji's concept of the mixed economy and of self-reliance did give us industrial growth. But it also created a high-cost economy. We have to get out of it. At the same time, how do you give more and more employment? How do you ensure that purchasing power does go to the people? How do you make sure that investments conform to the needs of the larger masses? How can items of mass consumption be produced alongwith items which enable us to compete abroad?

I am very clear that many of our bureaucratic regulations are counter-productive. We have to dismantle them. I'm also very clear that we cannot build the country wholly on the resources of the government's treasury. So while we optimise government spending, we will also have to consider how to trap resources outside the government.

All this becomes an area of intense political debate. There is such a thing called the politics of economics. I intend to interact with the friendly parties, with the Left and the BJP, to evolve a consensus. To that extent the process will take time, it might also appear to be slow. But the gains will be solid. And they will provide powerful arguments to take the next steps.

Do you anticipate any resistance within your own party?

In a debate of this nature there are bound to be differences of opinion. We should not fight shy of them. Within the party I will allow the fullest debate. Only those who are politically insecure fight shy of debate or dissent or of the democratic process itself. We should realise that democracy is a contentious affair. If you are shy of contention, you are shy of democracy.

That is the new culture we are developing, slowly but surely. I have been derided for this, ridiculed, called names. You see. I know the other culture where a single word of dissent was supposed to be heresy. There was an apparent solidity and unity in the party. But this could not keep the country united. The country has paid heavily for this.

The only way to keep the country united is to create a truly federal ethos, a democratic ethos of dialogue and interaction. It will take time to lend legitimacy to this process. Tolerance of dissent has for decades been regarded as a weakness in politics, as something not legitimate. I have the courage of my conviction to go through all the ridicule. One day I will be able to say, and so will you, that this is a better political ethos.

This ethos is not altogether new ; it did prevail in Panditji's time.

The country was no weaker for it. You suppress a democratic process now have to pay the price some time later. All I can say to such people is : forgive them, lord, for they do not know what they do.

They (the Congress) got stuck in a system of governance which I shall call a system of departments. It turned itself into a government department. That was the trouble. They thought that if you run a department well you are in fact running India.

How do you appear to be so relaxed on this question of dissent when the two friendly parties are critical of you and when some of your senior colleagues in your own party rarely miss an occasion to snipe at you.

If they criticise me politically can there be a greater challenge to prove yourself ?

When you say this you almost seem to be taking an artist's delight.

Yes. That is why I'm an artist. You can face this only when you don't care for your own peace. Once that worry comes in all is finished. I can say : alright if the government goes it can always come back ; you have not lost. Certainly we will not lose. If you are likely to become a non-person once you are out of government then you should begin to worry, not otherwise.

Is it because you were planning to bring about far-reaching changes that you once went on record to say that you would be a disaster as a Prime Minister.

(Long pause) That time what I had in mind was that there are better, more talented, more experienced people in the party.

It would be better if they were there and given the job. If the best is not made available to the country, it would be a disaster.

I knew, though, that if I join the government I would not be able to continue without the confidence of the party. I was also aware of the limitations of government officers. While I very much love to work among them I've never been deluded into thinking that they do everything.

How have you developed this sense of detachment? I'm told you meditate a great deal.

Even a tinge of an artist gives a lot of sense of detachment. The political world, indeed the entire external world, is hierarchical, however you might define it and wherever you are. You measure it all the time: how many are below you, how many are above you.

But in the field of creation there is no hierarchy. And there is your liberation from the political order and every other order. You're not measuring either yourself for arrange else. You are just being yourself. No politics can take away that from me.

No Prime Minister of the country has quite attempted to bring such an 'artistic' or 'creative' dimension in politics as you seem to be attempting.

I've not cultivated this I've grown that way it. It's very difficult to analyse it. But let me say this: behind the facade of all great things, of things, that are supposed to be big, you find something very human.

I wonder what thoughts ran through your mind when you were sworn in as Prime Minister.

My thoughts were: after all, this is only our office. This is not something you would show off. Office is an education. It depends on what you wish to do with it. How do you fulfil the trust of the people. They had put up a very hot fight against the Congress party, against the whole structure. On my part I know I could fulfil this trust if I defined everything in terms of human relations. My religion is human relations: it starts and ends there.

In this context how do you propose to strike a balance between equity and merit ?

The two are not incongruous. Let's look at it this way : to bring up a child, is it the mother or the nurse who has got great merit ? A mother is a mother not because she is knowledgeable but because she cares. An administration is an administration not because it is knowledgeable but because it should care.

Today's biggest criticism against the bureaucracy is not that it is not learned or meritorious. It is something else. This bureaucratic machinery has both a head and a heart. But all the time they seem to be testing only the head. People who undergo suffering expect them to test the heart as well.

But tell me : where is it said that only top intellectuals should come in the administration ? They certainly are needed very much. But may be they can do better in the universities. They can be better teachers, perhaps also better writers. Are we not depriving our country of good literature by failing to provide talents with an atmosphere to write and create ? Why do we want to mould all of them into officers ? Is it because only officers and politicians enjoy the image of being in charge of everything ? Is it not worth the while that this talent should be put to more creative work ?

I sense in you a certain amount of disillusionment with the intellectuals.

No. All I'm saying is that they can do more creative things than pushing files and taking orders from a minister. Every officer is dissatisfied. I keep a watch on these things. Why does this happen ? Because society does not give the opportunity to creative talents. You don't respect your scientists, your writers. The only way a person can display a medal of achievement is by becoming a politician or an officer.

Do you then have a hierarchy of merit ?

No. Each one is needed. After all, society is a mosaic. You need everyone.

I suspect, Prime Minister, that with your ambition to

de-bureaucratise society you are again on to something quite far-fetched.

I don't know (laughs). No, it is not like that. I've yet to concretise my ideas. But whatever we are trying to do will have an impact only if we don't bureaucratise the exercise. I'll remain unintelligible to many people for quite some time.

You mean to intellectuals? Don't you think this entire Mandal business would have gone down better had it been better explained? You know, lots of people are saying today that we, who have never thought in terms of caste, are suddenly made to do so.

This is not so. Ask these people whether they are marrying into other castes. They don't accept other castes in their own house and they demand that the caste system should be abolished. One generation passes it on to the next and they say: the government should abolish the system. They argue that the Mandal commission has come to remind them of caste. If a son or a daughter marries elsewhere, they turn him or her out of the house. Had they not accepted such a thing in their own house, I would have understood.

The suspicion is widespread that with Mandal the question of equity is related not to the need of an individual but to his caste origin.

We are not looking at it as a permanent feature. It is an interim feature meant to dramatically counter discrimination. It gives a shock to society. When you breathe, you are not conscious of the air. Similarly, you are not conscious of caste if you are not actually living it like a Scheduled Caste person.

I will say only this: clothe and house everybody, then reservations can go. Make everyone not exactly equal but fairly equal. Then there will be no need for reservations.

That is a tall order

Yes. But here lies the difference between what has been

happening so far and what we are trying to do. When I was a standard 10 student my biggest satisfaction was to have taught a child the alphabet.

Courtesy : *Times of India*-

‘V.P. Singh Cannot Win on the Caste Slogan’

DILEEP PADGAONKAR *interviews*
RAJIV GANDHI

Like General De Gaulle's exile before he returned to office in 1958, Mr Rajiv Gandhi clearly looks upon his stint in the opposition as an interregnum, the better to prepare his return to South Block. The months out of power have enabled him to reflect on his errors and inadequacies, to focus his goals more sharply, to bring a sense of realism to his vision about the future of the state and society in India.

As this extended conversation with him reveals, the results of his labours are as yet tentative. To his interlocutor Mr Gandhi still appears to be well-meaning, quietly confident and determined. He still exudes a sense of earnestness. But he no longer holds in contempt the seamier yet indispensable aspects of politics ; the manipulative skills, the ruthlessness, the cynicism, the tactical finesse and the strategic daring.

This is easily explained. Mr. Gandhi has to reckon with a Prime Minister who has demonstrated, often dramatically, a political flair of an exceptionally high order. In effect, Mr V.P. Singh has seized the initiative on virtually every front, ever since he ousted Mr Devi Lal from the cabinet, it is he who has set the

agenda on the political scene and indeed redefined the parameters of political activity in the country.

This is why the Congress, as the main opposition party, has appeared to be on the defensive. Its record in Parliament has been mixed, to put it mildly. Mr Gandhi himself has not earned laurels as a parliamentarian. All the same, he can legitimately take credit for the fact that his personal popularity had appeared to grow in the wake of his country-wide tours, before the Prime Minister sprung the Mandal surprise.

At any rate, nothing has threatened his leadership of the Congress. His relations with Congress chief ministers remain cordial if not effusive. More than anything else, however, the stand he has taken on the Mandal commission and on the Ayodhya controversy—or rather the stand that he persuaded his party to take often by resisting strong pressures from some of his senior colleagues—indicates a slow but certain return to the time-tested policies of the Congress : anti-casteism and anti-communalism.

If these policies still appear to be somewhat ambivalent and at times even lacking in consistency, the reasons have to be sought in Mr Gandhi's keener appreciation of the complexities of India and of the widely divergent interests of its electorate. Some may regard this as a euphemism for expediency. Perhaps. Still it is difficult to escape the impression that the former prime minister is well and truly putting his act together to prepare for the next poll whenever the wily current Prime Minister chooses to announce it.

General De Gaulle had to wait for 12 years to end his exile. Mr Gandhi, though he makes strenuous efforts not to display impatience, clearly thinks and acts as if his waiting period will last as many months. Excerpts from the conversation held over two hours on August 30 :

Responsible Party

To return to the question of your work as a moderniser. The CWC adopted a resolution on the Mandal commission only on August 30. Why did it take so long for your party to respond to the initiative taken by the Prime Minister ?

I responded the next day at a party meeting. Then the Prime Minister brought in another set of reservations. We were waiting for the government to sort of settle down. We did not know whether the Prime Minister would invite us for talks. He did not do so.

On the other side, in the country, it became a confrontationist issue. We had a choice : we could jump in on either side, or we could jump into try and cool things down. As a responsible party we have to jump in to cool things down. It would have been the easiest of things to take things up ; we could really have had a ball on this. We avoided that. We waited because if we had intervened to end the conflict too early, our initiative would have been thrown out. We were trying to get the timing right. Our resolution is not as strong in some areas as I would have liked it to be. But it is a majority view of the working committee. I feel it is resolution which will cool things down, help pull things together and end this caste war that has started off”.

To promote social equality entirely on a caste basis ?

I react very strongly. I don't think we can do it. We destroy our country, we lose our goals. One part of what we set out for ourselves is a classless and casteless society. Having said that, we have to look at the situation today. Things have slipped up in the past. We have come to define backward groups and classes as backward castes. This is a reality. You can't today pretend that it has not happened. So you have to move in a manner that you do not go down that road. You have to move out of that position. This is what we have tried to do in our resolution. We have broadened the definition. We have said that socially and economically backward classes are not backward society castes. We must broaden the definition to include groups who are not defined by caste”.

It was Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's view that the greatest achievement of the Constitution was that it regarded the individual and not the village, community or caste as its basic unit. Over the past 40 years this seems to have changed.

“No, I don't think this has changed. I feel that responsible people in the country still feel very much that this must be our goal. What has happened in between is that a large number of our people have not moved away from the caste system.

Indeed they have sometimes bolstered it for political or economic gain or aggrandisement”.

Change of Stance

Why do you think the Prime Minister chose announce the implementation of the report now? The report existed throughout your period in office and he was part of the government?

If I remember rightly, he was Chief Minister of UP when the report first came out. He opposed the report at that time. He opposed it when he was with us.

The only reason I can think of is that being an issue based person, as he says, the issue of the day was Devi Lal's rally. The question before him was whether certain Chief Ministers would support Devi Lal in that rally or not. The decision was taken on the spur at the moment to keep his party from splitting.

But surely the Prime Minister could not have ignored the implications of what he was doing?

I just don't understand. Because there are two parts to the problems with any such measure. The first is that there is strong opinion on both sides. There are those who say, 'You must help more and, therefore, we need more reservations'. Finally there are those who go to the extent of saying, 'Divide the whole 100 per cent into categories'. There are strong disagreements between these two sides.

Anybody who is implementing these measures must realise that he has to lay the ground by a debate. And any such debate must involve major people concerned with the issue. We had a number of meetings with parties and states when we were in government. We found that it was much too tricky. The ground had not been laid for us to come out with a measure like this without causing a caste division. I Just do not understand why he did this in such a rush, except for his internal party problems.

But he says this is part of his party's election manifesto.

There were so many other things in the manifesto. If he was only worried about jobs, he should have first done something about the right to work. This does not give rise to

social tensions. Yes, there would have been certain financial problems. But at least your society is cohesive.

What then is the path chosen by the Congress as far as Mandal is concerned ?

Let me talk for myself because there are lots of views in the Congress. Two aspects have to be kept in mind. Today the major challenge, as I see it, for the nation is rapid development. If the nation does not move ahead at the fastest possible pace, we are going to miss out on the global changes that are taking place. If we are not on the scene as a major player very soon, we will not be a player at all. I don't know whether the time limit is one, two or five years. But that is about all. If we are going to get bogged down in other things, we are going to be in trouble.

Economic Factor

Hence, rapid development. Common wisdom is that you get meritocracy in all the right places and then everything will work very well. That is valid upto a point. Because if you think that meritocracy belongs only to certain groups, you create social tensions. Whatever speed is developed with meritocracy is reduced by such social tensions. You must balance this by bringing more and more people out of their economic, social and educational backwardness. I would like to bring in the economic factor. Forty years ago, it may have been less of a factor. People then were very poor. Today it is a factor. People have come up. Alternative action has to be given to these disadvantaged groups so that they come up.

Where do you strike a balance ? The supreme court has put it at 50 per cent. The supreme court stand is just fine. We should have a certain part reserved as open which cannot be encouraged upon. I cannot speak of percentages, but 50 per cent is a good starting point for the discussion. With the government's decision 50 per cent has indeed become the starting point

Then you get into the question : How do you ensure that those who get in through reservations are of the highest standards ? If someone in the non-reserved quota is a 90 per center, you do not want the person in the reserved quota to be

a 40 or 50 per center. You want to bring that up to 80 per cent. And for this you take measures. economic and educational, to push up this percentage. But the government has thought nothing on this side. It has not thought of improving the economic, education and social standards of these classes. They have categorically said that they are not going to do this.

“I think we should categorically demand not reservation in present institutions—because you are then dividing again—but new institutions, an increase in spending on education. We had set a target of six per cent of the GDP for education. Let’s try for that.

Let us also accept the fact that there are many in the OBC’s who are not really backward. If we have someone who has been a Cabinet Minister with my mother. with me, for 15 years, can we rightly say that his family deserves reservations? I say no. There must be factors which eliminate such people. If someone from the backward group has the money to send his child to a private school, why does he need a quota if he can get good schooling at Doon, St Paul’s Mayo, any public school”.

Or St Vincent’s?

Or St Vincent’s. Why should he want to bag a reserved seat? That should go to someone who deserves it. If you’re a tax payer, why should you be counted as a backward? If you own land, property—the quality and quantity can be discussed—why should this not be treated as a disqualifier? You must say, once people achieve this, they disqualify, they do not come in the reserved category.

“You will thus get more and more deserving people who will get help. You will get society into what can be broadly called the classes-casteless land.

Educational Step

Should this also be time-bound?

“It is difficult to say. Look at the United States. Their Constitution is 200 years old. It took a long time for blacks to get votes. Even today affirmative action is needed for blacks. I don’t say we need 200 years because human attitudes were—

different 200 years ago. It is going to be much faster today. I don't think we should set a limit. But in the meantime it should have been a system of elimination. For example, if a family has class-A government servants and if you take them out of the reservation system, you will come to the point where you can think of setting a time limit.

Another good measure—at least for the sake of argument—is the cut-off into universities in the open and reserved sectors. In the north, the cut-off between the open and the scheduled caste reserve is very wide. In the open it is 86 per cent in some subjects, 84 in some others. In the reserved, it is as low as 55. The gap is large as long as the gap is large, one can assume that there is need for help because these students (in the reserved category) are simply not making it.

Compare that to Tamil Nadu. In that state, there was a difference of only two per cent between the cut-off in the open seat and the backward reserve seat. The figure needs to be checked again. But at any rate the difference is minimal. When you come to that sort of equality in educational terms, you can start thinking of qualifying your affirmative action so that the really weak benefit from it. Sons and daughters of engineers, lawyers, government servants, politicians, who get all the social or economic backing, may benefit and the really backward are left out. Maybe the system, over the past 20 years, has pulled the backwards up to the extent that in educational terms at least, they are equal to the others. That is the sort of indicator you can focus on to determine whether equality is achieved.

South Backward

Yet the fact remains that large-scale reservations in the southern states did not provoke the kind of backlash that you now find in the north ?

You must look at the lists. In the south, practically everyone is in the category of backwards. Very few groups are left out. This is why there was no conflict. The population break-up also has a very large percentage of backwards. But

also if you look at the southern states, one of the answers given is that quality of administration will deteriorate.

Now I don't think you can count this as the sole factor for the quality of administration. There are so many other things also. But even if you want to look at that also—because the Prime Minister pointed out something in Parliament. He said in the northern states there is no reservation and 80 per cent of them in the administration are forward castes. That is why there is so much of maladministration, corruption and bungling. So it is the upper castes and meritorious which are doing this.

Merit In All

I think this is a totally facetious argument. So many things are at work that you cannot start defining everything as caste. And if you are a casteist and that is what stuck in your mind, perhaps these are four priorities and you think like it. But in my mind there are other indicators and definitions which are much more important than just caste. And one more thing which we did include in the AICC paper : we must understand that when we talk of merit are we talking of merit of the two-year-old child, that is the inherent merit in a two-year-old child, or are we talking of the merit of somebody has come through an educational process.

I think we can safely say that the average Indian is intelligent. There is tremendous merit in every child that is born. The question is how much opportunity is given to that child to develop that merit. And that is where opportunity comes in. If you were an urban dweller, even if the child does not go to school, there is so much going on around him (and) he learns a lot. Now you try to compare him to a child living in a tribe in the middle of Bastar jungles, Arunachal hills, or a distant village in the Garhwal hills, who also does not go to school. There is a tremendous difference.

Perhaps the schooling that the remote area will give the child will not even be upto the general knowledge the child in the urban area picks up by just being present there. So merit I think is there in everybody. You cannot say that this class or

caste has merit and that does not. It is all over. It is just that opportunity is being given more to certain groups for historical reasons, for economic reasons and you must change that. It is also necessary to change that because if you want the nation to really get going you have to go to make the best of your resources. And the biggest resource we have got is human resources."

Indian society has paid a terrible price for believing that merit is the attribute not of an individual but of a caste. It will now be paying an equally terrible price for believing that equality and need is not an attribute of an individual but of a caste or community.

I absolutely agree. That is why I am very clear that a caste definition of backward is not bad, it is terrible. The fact of life is that we have got it. I can only talk of today and five years hence. The fact of life is that it is there. Also every single judgment and I think every single report on backwardness has said class is not the sole determinant of backwardness. We all ended up by defining it as only caste. So the fact is today you have as the starting point a caste list which tells you (who are) backward. The ridiculous thing is that even those religions which do not have castes have been forced to have a caste so that they can be included in the list. We are telling Muslims that such and such group in the Muslim is a backward caste Muslim. Now you must get out of this definition. You can get out of it by a number of ways. And it is necessary to go into that.

Is it your feeling that this is done to build up reliable vote banks?

I think politicians feel it. I do not think the voters vote on it.

Do you think Mr V.P. Singh will win votes because he is consolidating on the OBC factor, the Muslim factor and the Harijan factor, etc., etc.?

I think he is in for a rude surprise. Look at the last series of elections. There is a sort of watershed in our elections: (the one after) 1969 when there was a split in the Congress. Then '71, '77, '80, '84, '89. Were any of these won or lost on the caste slogan? Caste slogan is not new. Not one of them was won

or lost on this slogan. And I go beyond that. Not one of them was won or lost on a religious slogan.

And that brings us to what I think is your party's ambivalence on the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmbhoomi dispute. I think in your interviews you had said that you were going to launch a mass movement to gain minority support. Would you lead this movement yourself or pass it on to one of the other leaders of the Congress ?

I would lead it myself. Depending on where and what the situation is. But well, definitely, I will lead it myself.

Courtesy : *Times of India*.

“Are these People Wiser than our Founding Fathers?”

MADHU LIMAYE

Madhu Limaye, former M.P., socialist ideologue and associate of Ram Manohar Lohia, explains Lohia's understanding of caste in Indian society to justify reservation for backward classes.

“Ram Manohar Lohia's caste policy cannot be equated with casteism. In fact, his ultimate aim was to destroy all castes. Lohia believed that when the caste system was broken up, a class system—or what is known as the civil society in the West—would be created. Unlike the caste system, which has no mobility, the class system would be mobile.

“Those who talk about an economic criterion for reservations in services don't know what they are talking of. Those who are insisting on an economic quota should know that the Indian Constitution only talks of *socially and educationally backward people*. Have these people, who are propagating economic considerations, more wisdom than our founding fathers who enacted Articles 15 and 16 ?

“Let's take the example of a cobbler who has, say, set up a shop and has earned money. Perhaps he is economically better off than poor Brahmins, but is his social status in this society equal to that of the poor Brahmins ?

“Poverty is a common phenomenon. Most backward castes are poor. More than 60 per cent of the country’s population is poor. That is why the Constitution only mentions certain classes and sections which have suffered social and educational disabilities. Let us just stick to the Constitution.

“I have a few suggestions. We have no comprehensive caste figures. The next census should provide us with this information. There should be a list of backward classes for the purpose of Central government services.

Further, though the “Mandal Commission report has covered most of the male population of the country, it has not touched on one of the most oppressed sections of our society — women.

“I think there should be some reservations for women in legislatures and local bodies. Women should have a fixed quota of seats and these seats can be rotated. There should also be a quota for women in the services and the government should give special grants for destitute women to make them self-employed and set up hostels for working women. “Lohia was also doubtful about reservation in institutes for higher technical education. Instead, he thought there should be more emphasis on the expansion of educational opportunities for the backward classes and women.

“Perhaps, the greatest single factor that hinders reservations is the active opposition of the talented youth. If a student with 80 or 90 percent marks is denied educational opportunities, he is sure to turn against the system.

“But, if the upper caste is prohibited from entering the services, they will be forced to seek new outlets in the private sector which, in the long run, will help the country to develop. So, perhaps by diverting the upper castes away from government employment, we will help them improve their own lot as well as create employment opportunities for others.

“If reservation is to succeed, emphasis must be put on improving the intellectual level of the backward class students. This was Lohia’s approach”.

(Interviewed by Bishakha De Sarkar).

Courtesy : *Sunday Observer*.

Standing up for Mandalism

Bharat Kumar speaks to R.R. Bhole, a member of the Mandal panel, on the report which has raised one of the most furious controversies of recent times.

“V.P. Singh must implement all recommendations of the Mandal Commission even at the cost of his government’s collapse as he will get a stronger mandate if he goes to the people on this issue,” says R.R. Bhole, a former judge of the Bombay high court and former Congress-I MP who was a member of the controversial Mandal Commission.

Bhole, who now leads a retired life at his residence near Cooperage, strongly justifies the commission’s report which has raked up one of the most furious controversies of recent times. Interestingly, he is not surprised at the widespread violence all over the country over the report being accepted by the government.

“The commission had anticipated this reaction 10 years ago,” he said. “We had sought the opinion of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences on the possible reaction to our recommendations and were told that the Hindi belt would react adversely”.

He said there had been a reformation movement in the south but the north had remained backward so far as social outlook was concerned. Moreover, there have been reservations

for backward classes in the south while the concept is entirely new to the north.

Bhole feels the progress of the backward communities has already been hampered by keeping the report in cold storage for 10 years. Had it been implementing 1980, when it was presented, at least two generations of backward classes could have been benefitted. Further delay in the implementation would cause irreparable damage, he added.

Asked if reservation on a caste basis had any relevance in modern society, the former judge replied: "Reservations for backward class are necessary to bring about social justice. The preamble of the Indian constitution guarantees equality in social justice. It is the responsibility of every citizen to bear with the reservations for the sake of those who have been deprived of these fundamental rights for many generations".

Bhole does not think the reservations will widen the gulf between the upper and lower castes as the Indian society, particularly the Hindus, have been divided for several centuries on the basis of caste. There have been caste-based reservations under 'chaturvarna.' Manu smriti' also preached that certain professions be reserved. This tradition deprived a majority of the population of the right of education and selection of profession.

The Mandal Commission's exercise is to bring the 52 per cent other backward classes on par with the upper class so far as social status, education and financial position are concerned.

Bhole opposes the demand for reservations in government jobs on the basis of financial position, rather than on the caste basis. He argues that since the upper castes are already dominating the bureaucracy only the poor people in the upper castes will be given weightage during the selection of candidates during the selection of candidates for reserved posts. This will defeat the purpose of reservation for the backward classes.

Bhole further stated that the Mandal Commission recommendations were not based only on the caste system. "We have taken into account the social, financial and educational status of various sections of the society and caste is only one

of the criteria to determine backwardness”, he said.

But he admits there is a possibility of the reservations being misused. “The government can make a provision in the act to ensure that reservations are not made available to those who have enjoyed them for the last two generations”.

Bhole was a member of the Lok Sabha from 1980 to 1985 when the report was submitted to the government and later presented to parliament. He has had a bitter experience with the Congress-I government. “Neither Indira Gandhi nor her son Rajiv wanted to take a firm stand on the issue as they would have been opposed by the upper castes. The Congress-I did not want to take the risk and kept buying time.”

Punch in the Nose of Backwardness

LINA MATHIAS (interview)

Prakash Ambedkar, leader of the Republican Party of India, an ex-boxer and a qualified lawyer, who was nominated to the Rajya Sabha last week, talks about the Mandal report, his outlook on the problems of Dalits and other backward castes, and his progress in politics.

Prakash Ambedkar, 37, recently nominated to the Rajya Sabha, is busy receiving visitors in his study at Hindu Colony in west Bombay. His grandfather, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, used to work in the same room. Now, a photograph of Dr. Ambedkar adorns a wall of the study. The physical resemblance between the two is striking. Like his grandfather, Prakash Ambedkar is also a lawyer. But the similarities stop there. Unlike Dr Ambedkar, Prakash Ambedkar is not the undisputed leader of the Dalits. There are many competitors for that post.

Despite being one of many Dalit and scheduled caste leaders however, "Balasaheb" as he is popularly called, has rarely restricted himself to the problems of the Dalits. He is perhaps the first Dalit leader to have made efforts to organise farm labourers and sugarcane workers, woo the Muslims, and initiate

a dialogue with leaders of the nomadic and denotified tribes. Now, Ambedkar is also joining hands with a number of Christian organisations who feel that those Dalits and other backward castes (OBCs) who have converted to the Christian faith, should also enjoy reservation facilities.

Other policies of Ambedkar have also broken the norm. He has often been criticised for allowing people who are not Dalits to hold posts of importance in his organisation. For instance, Dr Neelam Gorhe, former chief of the women's wing of the Bhartiya Republican Paksh (BRP, Ambedkar's party before the Republican party of India - BPI-- united) and an important activist of the BRP, resigned recently. Although the ostensible reason Gorhe gave was that she could not contribute much to the party and therefore thought it best to leave, whispers of opposition to her from other prominent activists because she is a Brahmin are widespread.

Even in the union of municipal workers which Ambedkar heads, there are a number of prominent activists who are not Dalits. His ability to get non-Dalits to contribute to Dalit causes is in fact considered one of Prakash Ambedkar's major assets by those who support his policies.

However, the criticism often over-shadows the platitudes. One widely-perceived drawback of his style of functioning is that he has never been an active participant in any Dalit agitation. During the stir to rename Marathwada University as Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar University in the late '70s, Ambedkar was nowhere on the scene. He entered active politics (except for stray social agitations sporadically) only in 1983, when he called a meeting of activists to unify the splintered Republican Party of India. Due to this backseat attitude, his relationship with militant Dalit youth leaders from deprived backgrounds, who spewed anger, cries for revolution and poetry, was at best an uneasy one.

There are other areas in which Prakash Ambedkar did not create an impact. Compared to his chief rival, the nattily dressed, magnetic speaker, Ramdas Athavale, now a minister in Sharad Pawar's Cabinet, Ambedkar's dress sense is indifferent and his public addresses can hardly be said to be crowd-pullers. At times, these shortcomings have been

attributed to the fact that Ambedkar does not concentrate his energies only on politics. He is a qualified lawyer and an avid boxer. When he lost the 1986 Lok Sabha by-election from Nanded, there were snide remarks about "boxers" entering politics.

Ambedkar dismisses this by saying, "Yes, I practiced boxing for more than two years in college but I did not participate in any competitions. Now I have no time for either boxing or any other game. I continue to practice law only to keep in touch." Perhaps because Prakash Ambedkar indeed started taking politics seriously, those who had scoffed that he had inherited only his illustrious grandfather's surname and had only that attribute to capitalise on, have realised that he is capable of displaying shrewd political sense when necessary.

"I realised very early in life that it would be very easy to sell myself to the masses on the strength of my surname. But I wanted them to accept me as I am," he says. Does he believe he has now been accepted on his own merit? "I have not given the masses an opportunity to judge me because I am not part of any government. But people have great expectations, they want me to be infallible. I do not think I shall be able to fulfill that expectation," he replies.

This statement is not the modest appraisal it seems to be. Ambedkar is referring to the period of the "unity talks" late last year when various groups and factions among the Dalits came together to form a unified Republican Party of India (RPI). The differences that emerged during the talks and meetings were a source of constant satisfaction to detractors. Ultimately, Dalit Panther leader Ramdas Athavale decided to join hands with the Congress I, while Ambedkar chose the Janata Dal and the Left forces.

The differences were however, also perceived as an oblique point in Ambedkar's favour. He was wooed by leaders of the Left who were impressed by his Left-of-the-centre views and the ability to go beyond Dalit issues. During the unity talks, it was mainly Ambedkar who stubbornly insisted on going with the Janata Dal. Athavale and his supporters argued that in order to "fight communalism", joining the Congress-I was the only answer.

As often before, Ambedkar once again found himself facing fire for a stand which some had thought was commendable. He was accused by his critics of being sympathetic towards the Shiv Sena, and therefore reluctant to fight communalism. Some felt he was conniving with Hindu "communal" forces for political gain. How does he explain his close contact with the Bharatiya Janta Party and the Shiv Sena ?

"Look at it this way," he says. "With the announcement of the Mandal Commission report, the Janata Dal should have gained tremendous political mileage. It is well known that OBC members form the backbone of the Shiv Sena. It is also well known that the Congress-I and the Marathas have exploited the OBCs for political gain. Yet, Bal Thackeray's anti-Mandal stand has not started an exodus from the SS to the JD. This is because the JD leadership, instead of wisely differentiating between the leadership and the rank and file, has gone and antagonised the latter. I have made the difference and been sympathetic to the OBC, therefore I can claim greater access to the OBC mass in the SS than other non-SS leaders "

However, popular opinion among the Dalits is not in favour of the other backward classes. Many Dalits point out that frequently, fellow Dalits in villages have been attacked by OBC members, though they may have been provoked by the upper castes. On the other hand, while the OBCs also want reservations, they have never really identified with the Dalits, often choosing to look down upon them. Considering these complexities, Ambedkar's support to the Mandal report could be an indication of this relatively broader outlook.

He says, "Since the Mandal Commission was set up to fulfill constitutional obligation, I do not understand what the protests are about the Constitution's directives been followed and implemented these years, if these castes rehabilitated educationally and financially, then perhaps we would not have to face this situation today." In support of his argument he quotes his grandfather, who had said in 1954, "I will not be surprised if we have to throw out this Constitution."

He is also not very gentle with his friends from the Left who have not come out strongly in favour of the Mandal

report. "I wonder if all those who declared themselves progressive are really forward in their thinking. The 'buts' and 'ifs' in their comments on the report show that under the burkha of progressiveness, their interests lie elsewhere. Why balance the Left, almost all the political parties are on the verge of polarisation on this issue and I believe when the time comes even party whips will be ignored," he says.

Ambedkar firmly believes that with the certainty of a Bill being moved in Parliament in December on the Mandal report implementation, the country will be divided into one class receiving preferential treatment from the government and another fighting to maintain its historical privileges. True nation-building will only start when these two sections accept each other's existence and come to a settlement, he says.

Meanwhile, Prakash Ambedkar's personal fortunes seem to be taking a turn for the better after a series of political setbacks. When Ramdas Athavale was made a minister by Sharad Pawar early this year, it was widely expected that the Janata Dal would show political acumen and induct Ambedkar into the central Cabinet or at least nominate him to the Rajya Sabha. It is commonly believed that a leader in power is more attractive than a leader without power. But Ambedkar had a long wait before him. His nomination to the Rajya Sabha has finally been announced on September 19. Where he moves from here onwards, remains to be seen.

Courtsey : *Independent.*

Time for Judgment

TAPAN CHATTERJEE

Next week, the Supreme Court will begin hearing arguments for and against the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. Tapan Chatterjee discusses the issues involved.

Next week, the Supreme Court will begin its deliberations on the controversial Mandal report. Affidavits will be presented in a room where only a few can enter and the decision that will be reached will affect the fate of millions.

What are the issues before the court? What does the basic structure of the constitution provide in this regard? Does the report cater to them.

Our Constitution does not prohibit usage of the word caste. It appears without the prefix 'scheduled' four times in the Constitution and by implication twice. Exalted intentions of the Constituent assembly apart, it is evident that in spite of professed equality of status and justice, our Constitution is not 'casteless'. The Constituent assembly did not accept Ambedkar's draft: "Any privilege or disability arising out of rank, birth, person, family, religion or religious usage and custom is abolished." Instead, Article 17 abolished "untouchability" which is the only word used within quotes in the Constitution. Is it not an obvious reference to the plague of the caste system? The directive principles of the state policy too does not yet call for abolishment of the caste system.

Are caste and class synonymous in the context of 'other backward classes of citizen'? The court would certainly go into this issue. Article 25'1'b reads: "providing for social welfare and reform of the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of the Hindus." The conclusion is too obvious to deny synonymy. In addition, chapter XVI, which outlines the special provisions for the weaker section of the people, carries the heading "Special provisions relatings to certain—classess"—scheduled castes are included in this chapter.

It has been already decided by the highest court that inspite of constitutional provisions (Articles 14, 15'1 and 16'1) it is appropriate to have reservations but it ought not to exceed 50 per cent. Therefore, allowing some more reservations to cater to the backward classes within this limit of 50 per cent, cannot be an issue before the court.

The court, however, could ascertain if a class or "classes of citizens" is "socially and educationally backward" and continues to be so. The word class many have economic overtones and even other implications, but in our context it cannot be said that 'caste' is not a basis for classification and unreasonable in our social environ. A mere glance through our matrimonial columns in our dailies speaks abundantly.

The Supreme Court has also held that caste is also a class. The court could lay down norms for ascertaining backwardness, only if it finds the norms adopted by the government are unreasonable and suffer from infirmities.

In the instant case, the government has adopted the norms set out in the Mandal Commission's report, wherein three parameters have been used — social, educational and economic, and not caste alone. Why did the Commission use the economic indicator when the constitutional requirements are only two — social and educational.

That takes us to the first ever Commission on Backward Classes instituted under Article 340 on January 29 1953, under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar. That report was submitted in 1955, but without unanimity Members could not agree if caste and backwardness could be interlinked. Kalelkar too did not finally accept caste as the basis for backwardness in his forwarding letter to the president, but unlike others did not

record a minute of dissent. The Commission had listed 2,399 backward castes or communities and out of which 837 were listed as "most backward". On the basis of the 1951 census 930 such communities amounted to an estimated population of 11.5 crore, while SCs and STs accounted for 7 crore.

The then government headed by Nehru laid the report along with its memorandum of action taken before parliament on September 3, 1956 as per Article 340 (3). The memorandum admitted caste system as the "greatest hindrance...towards an egalitarian society". Nonetheless it went on to call for "some positive and workable criteria for the specification of socially and educationally backward classes." The parliament did not discuss that report.

The deputy registrar general also failed to evolve any such specification for backwardness in his pilot survey. The conference of state representatives on April 7, 1959 failed to reach a consensus, as did the state officers. Ultimately, on August 14, 1961, the ministry of home affairs wrote to all the state governments: "While the state governments have discretion to choose their own criteria for defining backwardness, in the view of the government of India, it would be better to apply economic tests than to go by caste."

Accordingly, neither lists nor reservations were made in central government service other than for the SC and ST. Further, the state governments were asked to adhere to their own lists, since it was professed that, "...any all-India list drawn up by the central government would have no practical utility."

It is this communique of 1961 that added the economic indicator to those constitutional requirements of social and educational ones for adjudging backwardness, without superceding the latter two. The Mandal Commission, thus, took the three indicators—social, educational and economic—and awarded 3, 2 and 1 points respectively to them. The commission had four social, three educational and four economic indicators—a total of 11 indicators accounting for 22 points. A caste that got a score of 11 points or more was listed as "a socially and educationally backward class."

It is, therefore, an inexactitude to say that the Mandal Commission determined backward classes solely on the basis of

caste nomenclature. It is worthwhile to mention here that Kaka Kalelkar himself had not totally rejected caste as the basis for backwardness or its remedies thereof. In his forwarding letter to the president he had clarified : "Being convinced that the upper caste among the Hindus have to atone for the neglect of which they were guilty towards the 'lower' classes, I was prepared to recommend to the government that all special help should be given only to the backward classes ... My eyes were however, opened to the dangers of suggesting remedies on the caste basis when I discovered that it is going to have a most unhealthy effect on the Muslim and Christian sections of the nation ... It is only when the report was being finalised that I started thinking a new and found that backwardness could be tackled on a basis or a number of bases other than that of caste."

If Kalelkar wanted criteria other than caste, then the Mandal Commission provided it amply. To base reservation solely on caste would attract constitutional infirmities under Articles 15 (1) and 16 (2).

Would such reservations affect efficiency? Article 335 provides that reservations in services and posts, even for the SC/ST, could be considered only, "...consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration."

The government on its part, has taken remedial steps so as not to adversely affect efficiency. It has excluded jobs in defence and scientific establishments and at higher levels too. The reservation quota would not be applicable to institutions of higher education. The central government has not enforced the reservation even on the states. The private sector too has been excluded. The central government has sought the 27 per cent reservation for the OBCs only in its own services. It would be up to the government to ensure efficiency in its own domain and for which it would remain accountable to the public.

Much din has been raised against the Mandal Commission report because it has allegedly used the 1931 census. This is a piece of sophistry, knowing fully well that the Constitution debarred any distinction solely on the basis of caste and hence

no census parameter of caste was drawn up for 1951 or thereafter. The report, on its part in chapter XI clearly states that a socio-educational survey was, in fact, carried out by them covering 405 out of 407 districts with the help of the bureau of economics and statistics of various states from February to June, 1980. This survey covered two villages and one urban block per district. If any error has crept in as a result, it would be detrimental to the OBCs and not others. This survey was supplemented by the registrar general's compilation of 1961. In the same chapter (11.20 and 21) the Mandal report considered the 1971 census report and 1977-78 per capita consumer expenditure statistics for the purpose of assessing educational and economic divergence and backwardness vis-a-vis state averages.

The census of 1931 indicates 7 per cent as brahmins out of the then Hindu population of 188 million. As against this figure (old India), the Commission has taken 5.25 as the brahmins. As for the Rajputs, the 1931 census showed them as 3.8 per cent, whereas in the Mandal report the corresponding figure is 3.9 per cent, while for the Marathas and Jats the figures used are 2.21 and 1.0 per cent respectively, Nit-picking notwithstanding these figures do not matter because the maximum permissible reservation could only be 27 per cent, while total OBC population could safely be around 50 per cent with such numbers being below the poverty line, in rural India.

The Mandal report had called for reservations for 20 years and not endlessly. Of this period, 10 years have already gone by. The court or the central government could carry out a review survey with the same indicators after another 10 years to ascertain if all the OBCs continue to be so even then.

The commission had carried out a special field survey of four states—Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in the South and Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the North. The field survey was done by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) under M.N. Srinivas. The Mandal Commission felt the need for this survey to ascertain why “modest welfare measures for OBCs have given rise to sharp resistance” in the North, whereas “in the South the whole operation was conducted quite smoothly.” The report

has also recorded that "Southern states have done much more for the welfare of OBCS than Northern states." The TISS came out with a nine-point hypothesis :

*If the communal reservation scheme has had a long history, retaliation by the forward castes is likely to be absent.

*If the forward castes are divided amongst themselves, the chances of retaliation are less.

*If the backward and scheduled castes are not getting on well the retaliation on the part of forward castes is likely to be high.

*If the backward classes are also politicised and organised, the retaliation on the part of forward castes is less likely.

*If the upper castes are suddenly faced with the prospect of losing their political and economic position - if a reservation scheme is likely to bring about a sudden rank disequilibrium—then the chances of retaliation on the part of such castes are very high.

If the forward sub-caste persons can pass off as backward caste persons, the likelihood of retaliation is less.

If the state as a whole has experienced a kind of revivalism or is mobilised against outside symbols, the backward class movement against the forward castes is likely to be less powerful.

The capacity on the part of the backward castes to retaliate is a function of their numbers, political consciousness, dominance and perceived lack of alternative opportunities.

If the non-government tertiary sector is expanding, the retaliation on the part of the forwarded castes is less likely.

That the Mandal Commission report has landed in the Supreme Court would come as no surprise to the Commission. Chapter VII of the report is titled "Social justice, Constitution and Law. This chapter was based on a special paper prepared by the Indian Law Institute, New Delhi, exclusively for the Commission. Ironic, for since 1985 the Supreme Court has eloquently held that the question of reservation is not a "...conflict between meritarian principle and compensatory principle... The real conflict is between the class of people who have never been in or who have already moved out of the desert of

poverty, illiteracy and backwardness and are entrenched in the oasis of convenient living and those who are still in the desert and want to reach the oasis. There is not enough fruit in the garden and so those who are in want to keep out those who are out..."

Recognition of Caste Reality

BALRAJ PURI

A dispassionate debate over the Mandal report is necessary as we have, it seems, to live with Mandal. For the Government that succeeded the NF government did not deviate a bit in its stand on the subject from that of its predecessor. Nor has any of the major parties repudiated the Mandal report, though some of them in response to the anti-reservation student upsurge in the towns and cities of the north India, expressed some reservations and qualifications, particulars in the manner of its implementation.

That social justice motivated the party that initiated the implementation of the Mandal report and the parties that are reluctant to disown it is toto would be an inadequate explanation for what they did. Their political compulsions must also be appreciated.

Similarly spontaneous and unprecedented student upsurge cannot entirely be explained in terms of growing competition in a stagnant job market. Intensity and magnitude of the anti quota stir and self-righteous and crusading zeal of the participants were no less inspired by theoretical rationalisation and ideological and moral sanctions provided by leading

scholars, intellectuals and journalists of the country, of course, belonging to what are called forward classes.

To be sure, these castes have, in the past, provided not only ideas but also leadership to egalitarian and radical movements. Now, too, the intelligentsia's opposition to reservation is more out of concern for efficiency of the system and unity of the nation than merely for the jobs for the caste to which it belongs. The concern is not entirely a rationalisation of the caste interest.

Mandal report is being condemned by the intelligentsia above all, for what is being called its divisive role. It is in keeping with the current elite thinking that distrusts all sub-national identities as indicated by the contemptuous sense in which terms like regionalism, communalism, casteism and tribalism are used.

In practice, sub-national identities are becoming more and more assertive and all those who are in the business of politics, have got to recognise and cultivate them. Even in the advanced democracies of the west, parties make conscious efforts to carve out their respective constituencies among different ethnic groups. This practice is sanctioned by what are called post-modern theories of politics which recognise ethnic identity as a basic human urge.

In India, gap between profession and practice is much wider, our intellectual elite condemns ethnic approach of parties to expand their influence as politics of power and politics of vote bank as if their can be politics without power and democracy without votes. Compulsion of politics in a democratic country like India demands manouëring and counter-manouëring by competing parties in working out permutations and combination of vast variety of communities.

Assertion of group identities is more a response to modernisation than a sign of backwardness and perochialism. Politicisation of caste, is an illustration of that. In its modern form, it is not an unmixed evil.

Caste meets some of the basic sociological and psychological needs of an individual. It gives him a sense of belonging in a system in which he is otherwise getting alienated and atomised. It protects him from outside threats including from

the State. It provides him emotional support at a time of, say, a bereavement when even those who are not on speaking terms with him have to regularly visit him during the period of mourning. Similarly caste is the primary circle of rejoicing and celebration on occasions like marriage and birth. An institution through which most of the people share their joys and sorrows cannot be easily dispensed with.

Again, in many cases, caste is the only linkage between a common man and sources of power. Instead of relying upon police or judiciary for redressal of an injustice, he would count on his contact with a person of his caste in a position of authority for the purpose.

Caste has also a role as an instrument for social reform e.g. on issues like marriage customs, widow remarriage, dowry etc and for social change. Most of the radical leftist movements use mobilisational potential of caste or tribe to fight against exploitation of landless or unorganised labour.

There are but a few illustrations of the functional role of the caste in a modern society. Mandal Commission did not revive the caste. It recognised the caste which had survived for quite different reasons and is a social and political reality. However, acceptance of the commission's recommendations by the Government of India consolidated castes in two broad camps of forward and backward and brought the caste polarisation on the centre stage of the Indian politics almost at par with emerging communal polarisation.

However, apprehension expressed by several political leaders and columnists that caste divide would further fragment and disintegrate the country which is already divided along rural-urban, north-south and Hindu Muslim lines does not have any logical basis. For these divides are not commulative is their effect but cut across each other. The new caste divide did, for a while, throw all other divides to the background.

In fact one of the motives attributed to VP Singh for hastening his decision on the Mandal report was that he wanted to reduce the impact of Devi Lal's rally on August 9 and thus thwart his movement for mobilisation of the rural India against the urban India. The decision, undermined the leadership of the rich farmers, represented by the Jat community, ever the

agricultural class. The new caste polarisation also tended to reduce the tension between the OBC and the schedule castes. As the anti-reservation agitation at most places was directed or was perceived to be directed against the very principle of reservation which hits both set of castes, they are coming closer to each other. The caste realignment has thus not only diluted the rural-urban divide but also reordered caste relations on a more egalitarian basis.

In a similar way forward-backward divide cuts across the north-south divide which was created by the polarisation between the Janata Dal-BJP combine and Congress, during the last elections. On the issue of OBC reservation, the South moved closer to the Janta Dal as upper castes in the North moved closer to the Congress.

However, the profoundest implication of the Mandal Commission, according to Swapan Dasgupta, is it : attack on the basis of Hindu consolidation by reinforce a set of alternative social allegiances (Times of India September 18). It constitutes, he adds, an organised attack on the Ram Janambhoomi agitation. The BJP, he fears, is threatened. If caste polarisation extends to electoral behaviour, with being reduced to a rump.

There is no doubt that Hindu-Muslim confrontation never assumed such dangerous dimensions after independence as it threatened to do on the Ram Janambhomi issue. Those who are seriously concerned over this grave threat to the secular and civil society of India and over the process of monolithisation and semitisation of a liberal and pluralistic Hindu faith cannot conceive of any better means than the Mandal report to avert this tragedy. They would hardly be bothered if the BJP is in the process reduced to a rump.

Some of the castes include more than one community and hence directly bridge communal divide. Gujars of Jammu and Kashmir state who are all Muslims, have closer affinity with Hindu Gujars of Himachal and UP than other Muslims of the State. The caste in their case plays a secularising and integrationist role.

From a secular nationalist angle forward-backward class divide is not only a lesser evil than rural-urban divide, north-

south divide and Hindu-Muslim divided but is the most effective anti-dote to them. In any case caste is the small an identity unlike that of religion and region, to threaten national unity.

But is caste system nevertheless an evil? Its rigid rituality, hierarchical grading, conformist discipline and exclusivity are certainly evils. But aren't these evils already on the decline? A Brahmin is now rarely held in reverential awe and to be a Dalit is no more a stigma. The importance of caste has increased than before more as a politicised entity and as a basis of identity formation.

Even in this form role of caste may not always be healthy, But does national identity or any other identity for that matter, always play a healthy role? What monostirety nationalism can become was demonstrated by Hitler not long ago.

Indian nationalism itself has proved an inadequate adhesive force for a vast and diverse country. It, after all, failed to avert partition and is alienating geographically and emotionally peripheral ethnic identities. In its extreme form, it threatens democracy also; as it did when Indira Gandhi adopted nationalism as her principal theological plank.

The objectives of national unity and democracy can best be achieved by supplementing nationalism with intermediary loyalties, which act as emotional bridges between individuals and the nation, and ensuring plurality of identities, on the one hand, and universal human values on the other.

The traditional liberal notion that individual is the basic political and social unit and nationalism is merely an arithmetic sum of individuals in an extremely simplistic view of the Indian reality.

If individuals were the basic unit, political set up at various levels could be comprised of individuals selected on their personal merit. Or if class was a basic reality, a composite team would have comprised of representatives of various classes. But what actually happens is that a rough balance is invariably attempted between claims of castes, communities and regions at every level. Political aspirations of a group are usually satisfied by empowerment of the group as a whole:

through individual representation. For all people cannot exercise power individually.

It is neither desirable nor possible to eliminate group identities. Success of the French revolution in demolishing the established three estates and in converting them to a "fraternity" of individual citizens merely paved the way for the emergence of a Napoleon Bonapart.

In any case, group identities do not disappear by refusing to recognise them, Caste didn't disappear simply because the column that mentioned it in the census was deleted.

National unity is not ensured by refusal to take cognisance of group identities but by accommodating their claims for due representation and satisfying their legitimate aspirations.

With growing politicisation, the OBC have started aspiring for application of this principle-broadly accepted in politics and social life—to the field of government services. They are estimated to comprise 52 per cent of the population of the country. But their share in central services is stated to be mere 4.5 per cent (the percentage may be 12 if peons and other junior jobs are also taken into account). Their share in senior jobs in the private sector is negligible. Mandal Commission recommended roughly less than half of their percentage share in population for reservation of jobs.

Reservation may not be the best method to remove this discrepancy. It would certainly create disparities within the OBC and is no answer to the problem of disparity between the rich and the poor. For the poor belong to all castes, including the forward castes,

But how are such issues settled in a democracy poor of all castes do not constitute a single identity whereas poor and rich of the same caste have become conscious of a common identity. 52 per cent other backward castes, 15 per cent scheduled castes and 7.5 per cent tribals have been clamouring for reservation. Most of the minorities, roughly 14 per cent, do not support the stand of the forward Hindu castes against reservation.

The issue of reservation would not be decided on its merit or demerit alone. Nor is social justice its strongest point. It is equally important as a mechanism of equitable sharing of power among self-conscious groups of people called caste. If

politics of vote has to continue, political compulsions would eventually clinch the issue. Backward castes may not always be economically poor. In fact it is after the green revolution when they acquired economic clout that their urge for power was aroused. They are demanding a larger share in administrative jobs to get more power than to get more money. As the forward castes, which at present dominate political, economic, administrative and intellectual fields, are numerically too small they may not be exclusive and final authority in deciding the issue.

However, if caste solidifies and as a monolithic, identity comes to command exclusive loyalty, it would not be in the interest of its own numbers, the system and the nation. For if divisions based on class, party and ideology are not able to cut the caste to size, democracy would be reduced to permanent majority and minority which would make elections meaningless. Moreover, no single identity can satisfy all human aspirations. It is a balance of plurality of identities that can meet the needs of a modern human beings. Otherwise caste inequities can become more oppressive than inter-caste inequities.

It is therefore in the interest of the members of the backward communities to realize the limitations of a reservation policy and caste identity. The poor among them must appreciate the claims of poor of the forward castes and make a common cause with them. In their own interest they may consider some formula for equitable distribution of benefits of reservation within each caste. Moreover, it would be folly to underestimate the potentiality of the student power and intellectual power which is today arraigned against the Mandal report. For building a radical new system and a dynamic nation, their cooperation is indispensable.

An ideological dialogue and not caste confrontation is needed to reconcile interests of forward and backward castes with each other and with those of individual within each caste and wider national interest.

Just as an ideology can be effective if it is supported by caste mobilisation, caste also needs an ideological direction to play a healthy role in the body politic of the country. Mandal report can contribute to its professed objectives only if it is

conceived as a part of a wider ideology that transcends caste (but not dismisses it) and has a more national concept of nationalism, respect for identity and autonomy of sub-national groups and of an individual therein and a clear vision of an egalitarian society-economically, politically and socially.