

'RESERVATION POLICY' FACILITATED THE RESERVED CATEGORY PEOPLE IN INDIA: A REALITY OR MYTH?

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'Equality' is one of the three important moral excellences of democracy (the other two being 'liberty' and 'fraternity'). The Constitution of the largest democracy in the world caters to equality for its citizens. Article 14-18 of the Indian Constitution especially provides this facility to the Indians. To honour the virtue of 'equality', a 'reservation' policy was taken in during the time of executing the Indian Constitution¹. The main objective behind this was to uplift the socio-economic condition of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)². Under this policy the reserved category of people were given certain 'quota' in legislatures [Art. 330 and 332], educational institutions [Art. 15] and government jobs [Art. 335]. The Constitution framers believed that the SCs and STs were economically and educationally very weak. Moreover in socio-economic arena they had been exploited by the upper castes for ages. Actually by giving some extra facilities to the SCs and STs an attempt was made to bring them on par with the rest of the society. Nobody can argue that this provision is against the virtue of 'equality'. Rather it has to be said that this policy can be very effective in upholding the ideal of 'equality'.

But in this article our thrust is to know whether this reservation policy really helped the reserved category of people or their real development lies somewhere else which is yet to be explored! Even after 54³ years of independence the literacy rate among the SCs and STs is 54.69 and 47.10 per cent respectively. Moreover school dropout cases (between classes I to X) among the reserved category of students is also a matter of concern. During the academic session of 2005-06, a total of 70.57 and 77.14 per cent drop out cases were noticed among SC and ST students respectively⁴. In India SC and

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1. January 26, 1950.

2. Later 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) people too. We, in this article intentionally excluded the OBC category people from our discussion. We only try to focus those who have been favoured by the reservation policy right from the execution of the Indian Constitution.

3. According to 2001 census (Source: http://www.nlm.nic.in/lit_scst.htm).

4. Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India.

ST population covers 24.4 per cent⁵ of the total population. It is needless to say that no real development is possible in the education sector ignoring nearly a quarter of the total population.

Now if we shift our focus from literacy to government service we find that no better picture is waiting for the SCs and STs. Even after 60 years of independence, reserved quota in the government jobs are not amply fulfilled. In this connection we may mention one decision taken by the 'School Service Commission' (SSC) of West Bengal. Earlier the SSC had a rule that a SC or ST candidate must get a minimum marks to qualify in the written examination. But after some years they were forced to do away with this criterion because of the lack of suitable candidates. Even intervention from the Honourable Courts is a normal matter in our country regarding the question whether reserved category of students have to get any qualifying marks in the joint entrance examinations⁶ or not. Both the cases are sound enough to establish the fact that reservations in the academic institutions fail to establish them in the professional arena.

Now the question is that what the ideal solution of this problem is. It is almost proved that 'providing' reservations exclusively in the educational institutions cannot change this scenario. Emphasis should be given on ensuring that the facilities reach the ones who deserve them. Here again the eternal debate as to which one is more important – 'quantity' or 'quality', will come up. It is beyond any doubt that a large section of the SC and ST children do not get sufficient meal in a day. In 1993-94 the SC and ST poverty ratio were 49.0 and 49.5 per cent⁷. So it did not amaze us at all when we noticed that the 'mid-day meal' programme turned out to be a huge hit among these categories of students. A positive reflection of this system is even seen in the attendance registers too. Now it has to be ensured that no reserved category student leaves school because of not being able to buy books or uniform or any such matter. The talented students must be sponsored by the State till the end of his/ her education. Every effort should be given so that the reserved category people do not think themselves marginalised anymore. So long as they consider themselves different from the upper caste people a harmful division always exists in the society. Here implementation of the existing legislatures enacted for reserved categories can play far more important role than formulating new ones.

5. SC—16.2 and ST—8.2 per cent according to 2001 census (source: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/scst.aspx).

6. Medical and engineering entrance examinations.

7. Source: 'Caste, Ethnicity and Poverty in Rural India' by Ira N. Gang, Kunal Sen, Myeong—Su Yun. Discussion paper No. 629, November, 2002.

Furthermore, special emphasis must be given to provide toilet facilities in every school. This is another major reason of the dropouts⁸. A number of girl students are compelled to leave school in teen age because of the absence of toilets in schools. In our country 37 per cent primary schools do not have toilet facilities. The facility of separate toilet for girls is provided by only 44 per cent primary schools. Further, drinking water facility⁹ is available only in 85 per cent primary schools.

We must always remember that 'reservation' policy could not solve these problems in the past 63 years. Those who think that 'reservation' is that 'magic-wand' which can change the lifestyle of the reserved category of people within a very short period should rethink about it. Actually in our country a big gap is noticed between the hope of the Constitution framers and the actions of the politicians who are in charge of implementing the Governmental policies. Almost all the political parties considered reserved categories as their vote bank and rarely do they think about their real development. That is why even after the 63 years of independence these two communities (SC and ST) are far away from the real development. We understand that in this era when practicing 'social engineering'¹⁰ technique alone determines the election results, perhaps no political party has that courage to call a spade a spade. It's true that in the past 2-3 decades a small privileged group has arisen within the reserved categories and the people belonging to this group are really enjoying the facilities of the 'reservation'¹¹ policy. But they do not bother for their fellows and are rather concerned to protect their own position within the community. We must always keep in mind that 'reservation policy' was not provided in the Constitution to capture votes. The framers of the Constitution never thought in this way. Their intention was to provide basic facilities to the 'have-nots' of the nation. Being Indians we feel no glory by declaring that our country has such and such per cent backward classes. Rather as Indians we would feel proud when no single backward person will be left in our country.

8. This reason is applicable not for only the reserved category students but for all categories students also.

9. Source: District Information System for Education, published by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (2009-10).

10. Under this policy the political parties are targeting different groups as their vote bank in lieu of influencing one individual voter (e.g. they prepare their agenda to satisfy SC, ST, OBC or Muslim community to capture vote).

11. In this connection we may mention that some 'Dalit' leaders spend crores of rupees celebrating their birthdays. While some others seek glory by spending huge sums to build their own statues. It is beyond comprehension how such preposterous and outrageous acts can bring about upliftment of the 'Dalits'.