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### **Backward Castes, Tribes and Classes**

The amelioration of the lot of the underprivileged people in India, particularly of the tribes and those castes and classes which are given an inferior status due to the accident of birth, has to be an important aim of any government committed to democracy.

The Constitution of India prescribes protection and safeguards for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) with the object of removing their social disabilities and promoting their varied interests. The main safeguards are : abolition of untouchability, protection from social injustice and various forms of exploitation, throwing open religious institutions of public character to all sections, removal of restrictions on access to shops, restaurants, wells, tanks, and roads, giving them the right to move freely and acquire property, giving them right of admission to educational institutions and receiving grants out of state funds, permitting the state to make reservation for them in services, giving them special representation in the Lok Sabha and the State Vidhan Sabhas, setting up separate departments and advisory councils to promote their welfare and safeguard their interests, prohibition of forced labour, and making special provision for the administration and control of the scheduled areas.

The machinery for safeguarding the interests of SCs and STs has been created in the form of setting up a Commission for SCs and STs. This has now been renamed as National Commission for SCs and STs.

It functions as an advisory body on issues and policies related to the development of SCs and STs. It includes experts from the field of Social Anthropology, Social Work, and other social sciences. The important functions of the National Commission are :

- To study the extent and ramifications of untouchability and social discrimination arising therefrom and effectiveness of the present measures.
- To study socio-economic circumstances leading to the commission of offence against persons belonging to SCs and STs.
- To take up studies on different aspects of development of SCs and STs to ensure integration of these groups with the mainstream of the society.

The National Commission consists of a chairman and eleven members. Its term is three years

### **Welfare Measures Undertaken**

The State Governments have separate departments to look after the welfare of SCs and STs and Other Backward Classes. Their administrative set-up, however, varies from state to state. A number of voluntary organisations also promote the welfare of SCs and STs. The important organisations of an all India character include the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Delhi; the Hindu Sweepers Sevak Samaj, New Delhi; and the Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, New Delhi.

The welfare of SCs and STs has been given special attention in the Five Year Plans. The size of the investment on the special programmes has been increasing from plan to plan. The expenditure of Rs. 30.04 crore in the First Plan (1951-56) increased to Rs. 79.41 crore in the Second Plan (1956-61), Rs. 100.40 crore in the Third Plan (1961-66), Rs. 172.70 crore in the Fourth Plan (1969-74), Rs. 296.19 crore in the Fifth Plan (1974-78), and Rs. 1,337.21 crore in the Sixth Plan (1980-85). The State Governments have also been spending a sizeable amount on the welfare of SCs and STs.

Some of the important centrally sponsored schemes are : (1) Coaching and training for various competitive examinations (IAS, IPS etc.) in order to improve the representation of SCs and STs in various services, (2) Post-matric scholarships for providing financial assistance for higher education, (3) Construction of hostels for providing residential facilities to SC and ST girls studying in schools, colleges

and universities, (4) Financial assistance to reputed social science research institutions for research in development and problems of SCs and STs, (5) Providing text books to SC and ST students of medical/ engineering courses, and (6) Scholarships and passage grants for higher education outside India

Besides the above measures to bring about their speedy development, the Constitution has also provided for adequate representation in the legislative organs at different levels as well as reservation in services and educational institutions. The reservation in 15.0% for the SCs and 7.5% for the STs. This limit has been exceeded in several states. For example, in the states of the north-east, the reservation for ST has reached the level of 85.0%. In a state like Karnataka, the reservation is of the order of 68.0%. There are moves in some states of the north-east to increase this percentage to 95.0 and in a state like Karnataka, the reservation may reach the level of 80.0%. Other states are not behind in this regard.

Though the principle of separate electorate was not accepted but the constituencies are earmarked from time to time from which persons belonging only to either SCs or STs can seek election. The number of reserved seats reflects their proportion in the population.

In government services, special quotas are allotted to them. The reservations are not only confined to recruitments but they are also extended to promotions for higher positions. To facilitate their adequate representation, concessions such as relaxation of age limit, relaxation in the standards of suitability, relaxation of the qualification and experience, have also been provided to them.

## **The Scheduled Tribes**

### *The Tribal Strength*

The tribal population of India, according to the 1981 census, was 51.62 million. It is estimated to have increased to 52.03 million in 1991. This is almost equal to the population of the United Kingdom. The tribals form 7.8% of the country's total population. India has the second largest tribal population in the world, only next to Africa. The tribes in India are spread over the length and breadth of the country. They vary in strength from a few hundreds to several lakhs. About two-thirds of the total tribal population of the country are found in the five states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Gujarat and Maharashtra. There are three states (Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh) where tribes

with more than 20 lakhs population are found. There are five states and union territories where tribes constitute 70% to 95% of the total population of the state/territory. These are Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. The following table presents some important facts about tribals in our country:

<i>State/Union Territory</i>	<i>Tribal Population (in lakhs)</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Population in the State</i>
1. Madhya Pradesh	98.14	23.56
2. Orissa	50.75	23.13
3. Bihar	49.33	8.75
4. Gujarat	37.57	14.00
5. Maharashtra	33.41	6.62
6. Rajasthan	31.35	12.13
7. West Bengal	26.03	5.87
8. Andhra Pradesh	22.26	5.12
9. Assam	13.44	9.48
10. Meghalaya	8.14	80.43
11. Nagaland	4.58	89.00
12. Arunachal Pradesh	3.69	78.85
13. Tripura	3.44	69.92
14. Manipur	3.34	31.13
15. Mizoram	3.13	94.28
16. Uttar Pradesh	1.99	0.22

Some of the important features of the tribals are that most of them live in isolated terrains, the main sources of their livelihood are agriculture and gathering of forest products; they do not cultivate for profit; they still depend upon barter system, they spend a greater part of their earnings on social and religious ceremonies; and a large number of them are illiterate and are victimized by unscrupulous forest contractors and money-lenders.

#### *Tribal Exploitation and Unrest*

For ages, tribals were considered a primitive segment of Indian society. They lived in forests and hills without having more than a casual contact with the so-called civilized and advanced neighbours. There being no population pressures, there was no attempt to penetrate their areas and impose alien values and beliefs on the tribals. But when the British consolidated their position in the country, their colonial

aspirations and administrative needs necessitated to 'open up' the entire country through an effective communication system. The British introduced the system of land ownership and revenue. Annual tax was trebled which was beyond the paying capacity of tribal cultivators. Under the increasing pressure of population, many outsiders also started settling in tribal regions. With their money power, they offered credit facilities at the doorstep. Initially, it provided relief to tribals but gradually the system became exploitative. Newly established courts of law helped the exploiters. This economic and later social and cultural exploitation aroused the tribal leaders to mobilise the tribals and start agitations. With the increasing feelings of deprivation, mass agitations, struggles and movements also increased. Initially they were against the blood suckers and usurpers of their rights but ultimately turned against the government or the rulers.

Tribal unrest and discontent, thus, may be described as the cumulative result of a number of contributory factors. The main factors were

- Lethargy, indifference, and lack of sympathy from administrators and bureaucrats in dealing with tribal grievances
- Harshness of forest laws and regulations
- Lack of legislation to prevent the passing of tribal lands into the hands of non-tribals
- Lack of credit facilities.
- Inefficiency of government measures to rehabilitate tribal population
- Lack of interest and dynamism among the political elites to solve tribal problems
- Delay in the implementation of recommendations made by high level bodies
- Discrimination in implementation of reformatory measures.

In short, the causes of tribal unrest may be described as economic, social and political.

### *Tribal Problems*

The main problems the tribal face are :

- They possess uneconomic holdings because of which their crop yield is less and hence they remain chronically indebted.
- Only a small percentage of the population participates in occupational activities in the secondary and tertiary sectors

- A good portion of the land in tribal areas has been legally transferred to non-tribals. Tribals demand that this land should be returned to them. In fact, the tribals had earlier enjoyed much freedom to use the forest and hunt their animals. Forests not only provide them materials to build their homes but also give them fuel, herbal medicines for curing diseases, fruits, wild games, etc. Their religion makes them believe that many of their spirits live in trees and forests. Their folk-tales often speak about the relations of human beings and the spirits. Because of such physical and emotional attachment to forest, the tribals have reacted sharply to restrictions imposed by the government on their traditional rights.
- Tribal development programmes have not helped the tribals much in raising their economic status. The British policy had led to ruthless exploitation of the tribals in various ways as it favoured the *zamundars*, landlords, money-lenders, forest contractors, and excise, revenue and police officials.
- Banking facilities in the tribal areas are so inadequate that the tribals have mainly to depend on the money-lenders. The tribals, therefore, demand that Agricultural Indebtedness Relief Acts should be enacted so that they may get back their mortgaged land.
- 90% of the tribals are engaged in cultivation and most of them are landless and practice shifting cultivation. They need to be helped in adopting new methods of cultivation.
- The unemployed and the under-employed need to be helped in finding secondary sources of earning by developing animal husbandry, poultry farming, handloom weaving and the handicrafts sector.
- Most of the tribals live in sparsely populated hills and communication in the tribal areas remains tough. The tribals, therefore, need to be protected from leading an isolated life, away from towns and cities, through the network of new roads.
- The tribals are exploited by Christian missionaries. In several tribal areas, mass conversion to Christianity had taken place during the British period. While the missionaries have been the pioneers in education and opened hospitals in tribal areas, they have also been responsible for alienating the tribals from their culture. Christian missionaries have many a time instigated the tribals to revolt against the Indian government.

Relations between the tribals and non-tribals are worsening and non-tribal residents are increasingly depending for protection on the para-military forces. The demand for separate states for tribals has taken the shape of insurgency in Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura. Neighbouring countries, unfriendly to India, are active in exploiting these anti-Indian sentiments. Infiltration of foreign nationals, gun running, trafficking in narcotic drugs and smuggling are very serious problems in these states surrounded by tribals belts.

In short, the main problems of the tribals are poverty, indebtedness, illiteracy, bondage, exploitation, disease and unemployment.

### *Tribal Struggles*

Numerous uprisings of the tribals have taken place beginning with the one in Bihar in 1772, followed by many revolts in Andhra Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland. The important tribes involved in revolt in the seventeenth century were Mizos (1810), Kols (1795 & 1831), Mundas (1889), Daflas (1875), Khasi and Garo (1829), Kacharis (1839), Santhals (1853), Muria Gonds (1886), Nagas (1844 & 1879), Bhuiyas (1868) and Kondhs (1817).

After Independence, the tribal struggles may be classified into three groups : (1) struggles due to exploitation of outsiders (like those of the Santhals and the Mundas), (2) struggles due to economic deprivation (like those of the Gonds in Madhya Pradesh and the Mahars in Andhra Pradesh), and (3) struggles due to separatist tendencies (like those of the Nagas and Mizos).

The tribal movements may also be classified on the basis of their orientation into four types : (1) Movements seeking political autonomy and formation of a state (Nagas, Mizos, Jharkhand), (2) Agrarian movements, (3) Forest-based movements, and (4) Socio-religious or socio-cultural movements) the Bhagat movement, movement among tribals of South Gujarat or the Raghunath Murmu's movement of the Santhals).

If we take all the tribal movements, including the Naga revolution (which was started in 1948 and continued upto 1972 when the new elected government came into the power and the Naga insurgency was controlled), the Mizo movements (guerilla warfare which ended with the formation of Meghalaya state in April 1970, created out of Assam

and Mizoram in 1972), the Gond Raj movement (of Gonds of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, started in 1941 for a separate state and reaching its peak in 1962-63), the Naxalite movements (of the tribals in Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Assam), the Agrarian movements (of the Gonds and the Bhils in Madhya Pradesh), and the forest-based movements (of the Gonds for getting customary rights in the forests), it could be said that the tribal unrest and the resultant movements were mainly the movements fighting for liberation from (i) oppression and discrimination, (ii) neglect and backwardness, and (iii) a government which was callous to the tribals' plight of poverty, hunger, unemployment and exploitation.

Three instances of tribal exploitation are highlighted to explain the cause of their struggles. At the time of Independence, there existed a government order in Andhra Pradesh according to which all land transactions had to be in favour of the tribals. In 1974, the then Congress government passed an order which permitted non-tribals to own 15 acres (5 wet and 10 dry) of land in the area. After this order, the non-tribals took away a sizeable part of tribal land. Tribals claimed that about 30,000 acres of land had passed into the hands of non-tribals in between 1974 and 1984. During this period, 2,000 cases of land disputes were lodged in courts and 400 tribals convicted. The Telugu Desam government quashed the Congress government order in 1984 because of which the non-tribals took a defensive position. The tribals were organised by the extremists against the non-tribal feudal classes. There were continuous incidents of violence between the Gonds (tribals) and the non-tribals. In one such incident, the tribals took away standing crops of cotton and jowar of the non-tribals. The non-tribals put up a fight. They burned the tribal hutments, criminally assaulted women, wounded and killed the tribals and forced them to do slave labour for them. In another incident, 40 tribals were caught by 250 non-tribals and handed over to police after a night of beating. In yet another instance, 21 non-tribals who were allegedly stealing firewood from the forest were caught by the tribals and taken to their village and kept imprisoned till the police rescued them.

In another case, on March 10, 1984, the Gonds hoisted a flag atop one temple in a place called Keslapur in Adilabad district in Andhra Pradesh. Some described it as religious flag and others described it as a flag of revolt. The police reached the place in four jeeps and two vans. When it left, 40 persons had been injured and 70 arrested. It claimed that "the revolt of the tribals at the behest of the Naxalis had been

suppressed". Was it really a revolt or was it merely an eruption of discontent?

The third case refers to a tribal convention organised on February 25-26, 1984 in Vidarbha region near Nagpur in Maharashtra. The venue was a small village called Kamalpur, with a population of 1,000 persons. The convention was expected to be attended by 20,000 persons. It was to be inaugurated by the President of Nagpur High Court Bar Association and presided by persons like Vijay Tendulkar (novelist), Tapan Bose (film director) and Suhasini (cine artist). Two days before the conference, all routes leading to the venue were sealed, 1,000 persons were arrested, and prohibitory orders banning the assembly of five or more persons were issued. Interestingly, the persons arrested were under charges like carrying objectionable literature, felling trees in forests, and theft of forest wealth (*Onlooker*, 7 April, 1984: 29). The chairman of the Reception Committee was arrested under the charge of theft of forest wealth. He was released by the magistrate but promptly rearrested on a different charge. Among the others arrested included musicians who were to perform at the convention, and representatives of student organisations from Bombay, Hyderabad, and Madras. Thus, what could have passed off as innocuous conference with few fiery speeches was transformed into a major episode giving the venue a battle-camp like appearance.

All this depicts the frustrations of the tribals. When the law does not help them, the government remains callous, and the police fails to protect them and harasses them, they take up arms against the exploiters. These struggles and movements indicate that the tribals adopted two paths of achieving goals: (a) non-violent path of bargaining and negotiating with the government and using a variety of pressure struggles without resorting to violence/revolution, and (b) militant path of revolution or mass struggle based on developing the fighting power of the exploited/oppressed tribal strata. The consequences of both these paths are different. One indicates struggle oriented to reforms, while the other indicates structural transformation of the community. The fact that tribals continue to suffer from problems and also continue to feel discontented and deprived points out that both the paths have not helped them to achieve their goals.

### *Development Programmes*

The British had superimposed their own administrative patterns in tribal areas and deprived the tribals of their traditional methods of

interacting with people. The tribals have no written laws but the sanction of the community has a force which none dares to resist. Every able-bodied person is ready to lay down his life in defence of his village in time of a crisis. The tribal village had been an autonomous unit and, barring areas such as the Mizo and Khasi Hills where the administration of number of villages was sometimes coordinated under a chief assisted by a council of elders, the village remained independent for all intents and purposes. The isolation helped them to retain the shape and strength of their social institutions and social structures.

After Independence, the Constituent Assembly appointed a sub-committee under the chairmanship of A.V. Thakkar, after whose recommendations the development of tribal areas became an integral part of development of the Indian people as a whole.

The bonded labour in tribal areas was made prohibited under the constitution. In practice, however, it continues to exist in some form or other in tribal areas of most of the states. In 1976, when the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act was passed, it was found that 80.0% of the bonded labourers in the country belonged to SCs and STs. To loose the grip of the money lenders and the *mahajans* on the tribals, the government organised Large Area Multi-purpose Societies (LAMPs). However, their performance has been reported to be poor. There have been a large number of instances when the tribals have been cheated into signing bank loans. The cooperative societies failed to extend adequate credit for productive purposes, to purchase agricultural and minor forest produce from the tribals and fair price shops of essential consumer goods.

Tribal development has been based on a two-pronged approach : (a) promotion of development activities to raise the level of living of the scheduled tribes, and (b) protection of their interests through legal and administrative support. The tribal sub-plans evolved for the tribal development projects during the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) and today (in 1991) cover 19 states/union territories, and 372 lakh tribal population. The plans are implemented through 184 Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) covering 73 primitive tribes. The financial resources for the sub-plans are drawn from state plans, special central assistance (by the Ministry of Welfare), central ministries' programmes, and institutional finance.

The amount allocated for the tribal sub-plans in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) was Rs. 1,100 crore, in the Sixth Plan (1980-85) it was Rs. 5,535 crore and in the Seventh Plan (1985-90) it was Rs. 10,500

crore. During the Seventh Plan, the specific objectives set forth under the tribal sub-plan strategy were : (i) raising production in the field of agriculture, small industries, horticulture, and animal husbandry, (ii) elimination of exploitation of tribals in money lending, bondage, forest, liquor vending, etc. (iii) development of education and training programmes, (iv) development of tribal areas, and (v) upgradation of environment of tribal areas.

The 20-point programme too focussed attention on the development of scheduled tribes, including assisting the tribal families economically to enable them to cross the poverty line.

The Tribal Research Institutes also play a useful role not only in the research and training of the tribals but also in the formulation of tribal sub-plans, project reports and their evaluation. These institutions at present are functioning in 12 states including Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. For marketing the tribal produce, the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) has been set up. It also works to eliminate exploitation of the tribals and realisation of better prices.

## Scheduled Castes

### *The Strength*

The total population of the SCs according to 1981 census was 104.75 million, which is estimated to have increased to 106.23 million in 1990 (*The Hindustan Times*, 12, April, 1990). The SCs comprise 15.7% of the country's total population. The highest number of SCs is found in Uttar Pradesh (22.3% of the total SC population in the country) followed by West Bengal (11.4%), Bihar (9.6%), Tamil Nadu (8.5%), Andhra Pradesh (9.6%), Madhya Pradesh (7.0%), Rajasthan (5.6%), Karnataka (5.3%), Punjab (4.3%), and Maharashtra (4.3%). Thus, about two-third population of the SCs (66.4%) is concentrated in six states.

About 84.0% of the SC people live in rural areas and are working as agricultural labourers, share-croppers, tenants and marginal farmers. Almost all persons engaged in jobs like sweeping, scavenging and tanning are from SCs.

In terms of work/occupations, according to the 1981 census, of the total scheduled caste population of 1,047 lakh, 441.8 lakh (42.2%) fall in the category of workers. Of the total workers, 53.8% are working as leather workers, 12.4% as weavers, 7.9% as fishermen, 6.8% as toddy-

tappers, 5.2% as basket and rope-makers, 4.6% as washermen, 3.7% as scavengers, 1.3% as artisans, 1.3% as fruit/vegetable sellers, 0.9% as shoe-makers, 0.4% as liquor manufacturers, 0.3% as drummers, and 0.1% as carpenters and iron-smiths. Remaining 1.3% are engaged in some other petty occupations. About two-thirds of the bonded labourers are from the Scheduled Castes. Literacy among the Scheduled Caste people is extremely low. It was only 12.4% in 1981 as against the all India average of 41.3% (excluding SCs and STs). Most of them live below the poverty line and are the victims of social and economic exploitation. In theory, untouchability might have been abolished but in practice, Scheduled Caste people continue to be the subject of discrimination.

### *Development Strategies for the Scheduled Castes*

A comprehensive three-pronged strategy was evolved for the development of the Scheduled Castes during the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85). This was a combination of three schemes : (i) Special Component Plans (SCPs) of the central ministries and state governments, (ii) Special Central Assistance (SCA) to SCs for the SCs of the states, and (iii) Scheduled Caste Development Corporations (SCDCs) in the states.

The SCs envisage identification of schemes of development which would benefit SCs, quantification of funds from all divisible programmes, and determination of specific targets as to the number of families to be benefitted from these programmes. The overall objective is to assist SC families to substantially improve their income. The provision of basic services and facilities and of access to opportunities for social and educational development are also to be brought under the purview of the SCs. During the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85), Rs. 4,481 crore were earmarked for the SCs. Upto 1990, only eight central ministries had formulated the SCs for the Scheduled Castes.

The Special Central Assistance (SCA) to the SCs for Scheduled Castes is an additive to the state plans and programmes for SCs. It does not follow the systematic pattern for special schemes. The states use this additional assistance from the Centre for income-generating economic development schemes in conjunction with the outlays in their SCs so as to assist the economic advancement of the maximum possible number of Scheduled Caste families living below the poverty line. For example, it may be illustrated that the percentage of SCP outlay of the State Plan outlay in between 1980-81 and 1988-89 had

varied between 4% to 7% each year, while the SCA during this period had varied from Rs. 100 crore to Rs. 175 crore each year.

The Scheduled Caste Development Corporations (SCDCs) in the states are envisaged to interface between the Scheduled Caste families and financial institutions in respect of bankable schemes of economic development. The corporations provide money, loan assistance to these families, thereby helping to increase the flow of funds from financial institutions to Scheduled Caste families. The corporations have been set up in 18 states and three union territories. Grants are given by the Central Government to the State Governments for investment in the share capital of the corporations in the ratio of 49 : 51. For example, when during 1980-81 and 1989-90, the State Governments' contribution in each year had varied between Rs. 140 million and Rs. 190 million, the amount released by the Centre to the corporations in each year had varied between Rs. 130 million and Rs. 150 million each year.

The corporations provide loans upto Rs. 12,000. Besides arranging financial assistance for traditional occupations like agriculture, animal husbandry and household industry, the corporations also arrange for diversification of occupations such as financing of small shops, industries, auto-rickshaws and many other trades and professions. Some corporations arrange for irrigation facilities too like digging wells and tube-wells. Some of them also impart training to enable the beneficiaries to take up profitable occupations or to improve their existing skills.

Sulabh Sauchalaya Schemes have been launched in several states for converting dry latrines into water-borne latrines in order to liberate scavengers and rehabilitate them in alternative occupations.

### *Crimes against Scheduled Castes*

The reports of the National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been regularly reporting an increase in the number of crimes against the Scheduled Castes. Most of the SC women are the victims of rape by upper caste men. The SC men on the other hand are exploited by upper castes by usurping their lands, giving them low wages, using them as bonded labourer, and so forth. For checking this exploitation, a set of comprehensive guidelines covering preventive measures have been formulated and communicated by the Central Government to the states for necessary action. Some of the measures taken by the states in this connection are :

- Gearing up machinery for apprising the government of disputes of land, wages, concerning the Scheduled Castes.
- Helping the Scheduled Castes in getting possession of lands belonging to them or allotted to them.
- Specially instructing police authorities to intervene in instances of criminal trespass into lands belonging to Scheduled Castes. The police is instructed to treat cases of crimes against Scheduled Castes as special report cases and arrange for quick trial and prosecution.
- Helping agricultural labourers in getting statutory minimum wages.
- Setting up special courts (in some states) for ensuring quick disposal of cases pertaining to Scheduled Castes.
- Instructing officers to spend a part of their time, when on a tour, in residential areas of Scheduled Castes
- Setting up special Scheduled Caste Cells under DIG Police to ensure that crimes against Scheduled Castes are properly registered, promptly investigated and expeditiously prosecuted.
- Setting up state level committees (in the states) under the chairmanship of the Chief Ministers to look after various aspects concerning welfare of Scheduled Castes.

The increase in the number of crimes against the Scheduled Castes recorded by the police is evident from the fact that as against 180 cases registered with the police in 1955, the number of cases registered in 1960 was 509, in 1972 it was 1,515, in 1979 it rose to 13,884 and in 1987 the figure reached at 19,342. The Untouchability Act of 1955 was renamed in 1976 as Protection of Civil Rights Act. The highest number of crimes against Scheduled Castes are reported in Uttar Pradesh, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. For example, of the total crimes against Scheduled Castes reported in 1987, 29.5% were reported in Uttar Pradesh, 27.8% in Madhya Pradesh 15.5% in Bihar, 6.4% in Kerala and 5.5% in Rajasthan. Further, 10.1% of cases were reported as cases of violence, 7.3% as arson cases, 7.1% as rape cases and 2.8% as murder cases.

As regards the atrocities and murders against the Scheduled Castes, the incidence of Belchi village in Bihar in May 1977 cannot be forgotten. Similar cases were reported in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh in between 1978 and 1991. Because of these atrocities, the cases of proselytisation of Harijans into Islam and

Christianity are also reported from time to time. Such conversion of religion was reported in Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu in February 1981 in which about 1,000 Hanjans were converted into Islam.

### *Evaluation of Welfare Schemes*

It is believed that the under-privileged people have registered little progress in the last four decades. There has been a quality of ritualistic formalism about many welfare and development schemes formulated for these castes, tribes and classes. The financial incentives and educational reservations have bestowed little real benefit to these groups. The quality of education has been described as unrelated to their lifestyle and questioned. No efforts have been made to induct them into the new ethos of learning and to inculcate in them verbal and non-verbal skills that are a pre-condition to academic success (Dube, S.C., September, 1990). The drop-out rate at the school and college/university levels has assumed alarming proportions. At the university/college level, the teachers complain that SC/ST students are seen only when their scholarship cheques are received from the Social Welfare Departments. They mostly remain absent from the class-rooms. Though their percentage of attendance remains very low, yet they appear in examinations only because of the policy of the university administration to withdraw the percentage of compulsory attendance at the last moment. That the quality of their education is poor is evident in their performance at the entrance tests for professional courses. An example shows that in 1989 in Madhya Pradesh, so few SC and ST students qualified at the entrance tests for professional colleges that the minimum eligibility marks for them had successively to be lowered. For engineering studies, the unreserved quota had to have at least 50.0% marks, for Scheduled Castes the prescribed minimum was 35.0% and for Scheduled Tribes 25.0%. Eventually, SC students with 15.0% and ST students with 7.0% marks had to be admitted (*The Hindustan Times*, September 3, 1990).

### **Other Backward Castes/ Classes**

The reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was provided in the Indian Constitution framed after Independence but the reservation for other backward castes/classes was announced by the Janata Dal Government only on August 7, 1990. As many as 27% seats were proposed to be reserved for 3,742 other backward castes/classes.

This was done in accordance with implementing the Mandal Commission's Report. This Commission submitted its report on December 31, 1980. It was discussed by both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in 1982 and thereafter the matter was remitted to a Committee of Secretaries for examination. The matter was repeatedly taken up in both the Houses of Parliament but no action was taken. The sudden announcement of accepting its recommendation has been described as a political decision of the then Prime Minister Shri V.P. Singh, taken without an indepth study of the various issues arising out of its implementation and also without verifying the correctness and validity of the selection of castes and the indicators.

What were the criteria used by the Mandal Commission for identifying a specific caste/class as 'backward'? The Commission used three indicators : social, educational, and economic (V. Gauri Shankar : *The Hindustan Times*, October 24, 1990). With regards to social indicators there were four criteria, in the educational indicators there were three criteria, and in the economic indicators there were four criteria. Thus, in all, there were 11 indicators

The four *social* indicators were : (i) Castes/classes which are considered as socially backward by others, (ii) Casts/classes which mainly depend on manual labour for their livelihood, (iii) Castes/classes where at least 25.0% females and 10.0% males above the state average get married at 17 years in rural areas and at least 10.0% females and 5.0% males do so in urban areas, and (iv) Castes/classes where participation of females in work is at least 25.0% above the state average.

The three *educational* indicators were : (i) Castes/classes where the number of children in the age group of 5-15 years who never attended school is at least 25.0% above the state average, (ii) Castes/classes where the rate of student drop-outs in the age group of 5-15 years is at least 25.0% above the state average, and (iii) Castes/classes amongst whom the proportion of non-matriculates is at least 25.0% above the state average.

The four *economic* indicators were : (i) Castes/classes where the average value of family assets is at least 25.0% below the state average, (ii) Castes/classes where the number of families living in *kutcha* houses is at least 25.0% above the state average, (iii) Castes/classes where the source of drinking water is beyond half a kilometre for more than 50.0% of households, and (iv) Castes/classes where the number of households having taken loan is at least 25.0% above the state average

The weightage that was given to each indicator was arbitrary and illogical. The social indicators were given a weightage of three points, the educational indicators two points and the economic indicators were accorded one point. The total value was 22 points. Castes which secured the score of 50.0%, that is, 11 points or above, were listed as 'backward'.

The government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission report on reservations for the backward castes provoked widespread resentment among students. Spontaneous agitations erupted all over the country. Most families endure hardship and sacrifice to educate their children. The prospects of gainful employment already remain bleak because of the vast unemployment in our country. Most students are haunted by the nightmare of unemployment or of underemployment. In such a situation the government's 'electoral' decision to reserve jobs on the basis of caste for an additional 27.0% to the existing quota of reservation of 22.5% for SCs and STs, was bound to create frustrations among the youth.

Earlier, the Minorities Commission headed by M.S. Beg in the report had cautioned against granting of recognition to backward classes as recommended by the Mandal Commission. When the Janata Dal government announced its decision to implement the Mandal Report, no political party openly opposed it. The parties adopted an ambiguous stance, though major political parties gave implicit or overt support to the report with the stipulation that it should be based on economic need rather than on caste. It was only the National Front government which remained adamant that the Mandal Report would not be diluted under any circumstances. As a sop, it offered 5.0% 10.0% reservation in government jobs on an economic basis in addition to the 27.0% proposed by Mandal. However, it is now a well-known fact that the National Front also was riven by internal dissension on the Mandal Report issue.

Challenging the true purpose of the government in accepting the Mandal Report, the students went on a rampage and took to agitations and immolations. Between 19 September 1990 (when the first case of self-immolation of a third year student was reported from a Delhi College) and 16 October 1990, 160 youth had attempted to commit suicide against the government's decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. All of them were below the age of 25 and most of them were either students studying in schools and colleges or were unemployed (*Sunday*, November 4-10, 1990: 39).

A large number chose to set themselves on fire in full public view while some took poison or burnt themselves to death quietly. There were 17 self-immolation attempts in these 26 days in Delhi, followed by similar attempts in places like Hoshiarpur in Punjab, Jaunpur and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, Kota in Rajasthan, and Patna in Bihar. In almost all the cases, the victims came from the lower-middle class families. The elite and the poor were, however, not hit by the anti-Mandal wave. In all cases, the students left behind melodramatic and vitriolic suicide notes. Some students were killed in police firing at various places; many were injured, while thousands were arrested. The students also damaged thousands of government vehicles, private buses, cars and trains. Though the exact figure on the extent of damage was never given by the government, the total loss was estimated to be worth several crores of rupees. There was a sense of frustration and anger at the system, a feeling that the system had given them the false hope that education would give them better jobs.

### *Arguments in Favour of Mandal Report*

The following arguments are given in favour of the Mandal Commission's recommendations:

- These fulfil the mandatory requirement of the Constitution (Articles 15, 16 and 46) of satisfying those sections of the society who have been simmering with discontent for decades.
- It is our moral and social duty to ensure that the oppressed and the suppressed people are at par with the affluent people in the society. The underprivileged people need to be instilled with a sense of confidence.
- The reservation will be only for the Central Government services and not more than 10% of the total population of the country are in these services. Of that 10%, 27.0% has been reserved for the backward classes. Therefore, the reservation will not adversely affect mass people.
- The recommendations are not based on caste as is wrongly believed by most people. For example, the Rajputs in Bihar are not included in the list but the Rajputs in Gujarat are included; the Patels of Bihar are in the list but Patels of Gujarat are not; and the Yadavas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are included but Yadavas in Haryana are not. Thus, the basis is the situation in each state of a particular caste.

- Nation's SC, ST and other backward class population with 52.0% strength has altogether a mere 4.0% representation in Class I government and public sector employment. This is purely injustice with weaker sections which needs to be corrected
- One argument given by the anti-reservationists against increasing reservation is based on the question of 'merit'. Here the assumption is that merit resides with the high castes who, therefore, must be allowed according to the colonial fashion, to continue to bear the burden both of running the state and its services and of civilizing the low castes. Is this argument valid and justified ? Is this not the argument supported by the British government while giving higher posts to the British and lower posts to the Indians ? Was not the Britishers' reluctance to grant self-government to India based on a similar argument ? Did we accept that ? If we had described that argument as fallacious at that time, how can we accept a similar argument against the lower castes and classes today ? Further, if it is argued that employment in this country has all along taken place on the basis of 'merit', have we offered concrete opportunities to the deprived low castes to acquire merit ? If our state places every citizen on an equal footing, denying, equal opportunity to the backward groups, it is nothing but continuing dominance of the oppressed. Extending reservations to these oppressed and the underprivileged people, therefore, calls for much soul-searching, something that many of us seem instinctively to resist

### *Arguments Against the Mandal Report*

The Mandal Report has elicited severe criticism from several quarters on various scores. Five major arguments against it are : (i) the criteria used for defining the other backward castes/classes, (ii) using very old census data for making population projections on the basis of an assumed constant rate of population growth, (iii) bungling of facts and figures related to the identification of the other backward castes/classes, (iv) non-objective sampling procedure and lacunae in the data collected, and (v) the terminological discrepancies specifically with reference to the use of terms like 'caste' and 'class'. We can elaborate these arguments as below :

1. The 'backwardness' has been defined only on caste basis. This is to perpetuate the abominable caste prejudices and discriminations endemic to the (caste) system. Any special provisions should be meant for all the poor irrespective of their caste and based only on economic criterion. Besides using only one criterion of 'caste' to locate the other backward castes/classes underscores the importance of multiple criteria—religion, income, occupation, and residence in a locality—stressed by many scholars.
2. Though great pains were taken to define 'caste', no definition of 'class' was provided and sociologically speaking, caste and class are two distinct categories. Hence, the Mandal Report at best located 'Other Backward Castes' and not 'Other Backward Classes' as required.
3. The criterion used for identifying the other backward castes/classes was erratic, whimsical and politically motivated. It was not based on a rigorous scientific method. The eleven indicators adopted by the Mandal Commission to determine social, educational and economic backwardness of caste/class do not largely satisfy the characteristics of good indicator. For example, the social indicator pertaining to the criterion of early marriage is not wedded to any particular caste or class. It is an age-old social evil prevalent in all castes or classes in general. Hence, it should not have been taken as an indicator to distinguish the castes or classes. Also, the social indicator relating to female participation in work may be considered an economic indicator, as the females have to work to augment their family incomes. Moreover, it is also a general tendency among rural women to assist their family in agricultural operations and this is not related to any particular caste or class.

Similarly, a person was to be treated as 'educationally backward' if neither his father nor his grandfather had studied beyond the primary level. He was to be treated as 'socially backward' if (in the case of Hindu) he did not belong to any of the three twice-born (*Dvij*) 'varnas', that is, he was neither a Brahmin, nor a Kshatriya nor a Vaishya, and/or (in the case of a non-Hindu), he was a convert from those Hindu communities which have been defined as socially backward, or his parental income was below the prevalent poverty-line, that is, Rs. 71 per head per month. Were these elaborate inquiries really made? The evidence does not indicate this.

Most dejecting part is the selection of economic indicators, where per capita family income has been completely left out. Family assets and consumption loans refer to their expenditure, depending upon whether they have big or small families, or they are prone more to following social traditions and incurring loans often.

Lastly, the economic indicator where the source of drinking water is taken into consideration is related to an exogenous factor not at all related to any particular caste or class. Thus, since the identification of the backwardness of castes/classes is not based on correct indicators, efforts to expand reservation cannot have any acceptability.

4. The definition and identification of 'backward' class is unscientific. When the Mandal Commission has identified 3,742 classes as 'backward', the first Backward Classes Kalelkar Committee had identified somewhere around 2,000 and odd. Either, the identification by the Kalelkar Committee was not correct or there had been a scramble afterwards by a large number of other communities to get themselves classified as backward classes in order to get benefits. Or, the other inference could be that a number of communities became 'backward' after the Kalelkar Committee submitted its report. It was, therefore, necessary to consult the State governments to identify the backward classes. For example, when the Kerala Government itself had identified 79 castes as backward, the Mandal Commission recommended 208 as backward. Similarly, Orissa did not specify even one caste as backward but the Mandal Commission identified 224. The Mandal Commission, thus, did not consider necessary to consult the State governments.
5. The population projection of the categorisation of castes was based on the use of the 1931 census data. At that time, the social, economic and demographic map of India was totally different. 'Caste' was identified on the basis of its traditional occupation. After 1931, the listing of castes was discontinued in census operations, and many changes have taken place between 1931 and 1990 by the rapid increase in industrialization, urbanization, educational growth, migration and mobility. As such, the old census basis adopted in 1980 by the Mandal Commission gives a totally distorted picture of the criteria

adopted. Land reforms made since Independence have appreciably altered the social and educational status of various castes and made them a significant part of the rural elite. The Yadavas and the Kurmis in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are the best example. The Gujars, the Koeris, and the Lodhs have also become owner cultivators in some states.

The urban population had increased from 12.0% in 1931 to about 24.0% in 1981. In urban areas, the level of income and occupation influences social status to a greater extent than position in the traditional caste hierarchy. Change from a purely agricultural economy into one in which manufacturing and service industries were becoming increasingly important have also resulted in the decline of some rural occupations. The Commission does not appear to have taken all these changes into account in assuming the population of the other backward castes/classes in 1980 to be 52.0% of that total. In 1990, when the government decided to announce the acceptance of the Mandal Commission's report, urbanization had increased by another 4.0%, and further changes had occurred in the occupational distribution of the population making figures and conditions based on 1931 census even more unrealistic.

In addition to urbanization and occupational changes, there has been substantial growth even of higher education, the number of students in universities and colleges increasing from 1.03 lakh in 1951 to 36.75 lakh in 1978-79 and 52.43 lakh in 1989-90. The increase in the number of SC/ST students shows that the expansion of higher education among these backward sections of population, undoubtedly facilitated by the grant of stipends, had been more remarkable. The total number of SC/ST students receiving higher education in 1987 was about 3.36 lakh in comparison to 4,000 in 1950-51. How could these changes between 1931 and 1990 be ignored?

6. Another false assumption made by Mandal was that the proportion of the other backward castes/classes among the non-Hindus was of the same order as the Hindus. The proportion of non-Hindu other backward castes/classes was taken as 8.40% of the total population or 52.0% of their actual population, but the derived figure of Hindu other backward castes/classes as given by this report is 43.70% and not 52.0%. It is only when 8.40% is added to 43.70% that the rounded total of 52.0% is arrived at.

The figures 8.40% and 52.0% were both taken arbitrarily. This is a fundamental methodological error of the report.

How was the figure 43.70% obtained ? This figure was derived by subtracting from the total population of Hindus (83.84%), the population of SC/ST (22.56%) and that of forward Hindu communities (17.58%) Working by this method, the figure obtained is 43.70%. This is a methodological fallacy.

7. The sampling procedure used for the socio-educational field survey was very defective. It involved the selection of two villages and one urban block from each district. The objectivity of the sample chosen with only 1.0% population coverage is highly questionable.
8. In determining the criteria for backwardness, the importance given to economic criteria was very inadequate. Of the 22 points set by the Mandal Commission for the classification of castes/classes as 'backward', only four points were given to economic criteria. This shows that the 'backwardness' of class was decided upon without much regard for the economic position of the group.
9. The Indian Constitution has not defined 'backward class' but it provides for appointment of a commission "to investigate the conditions of backward classes". It does not make it mandatory that the government should ask the commission to identify the backward classes. The Chairman of the Mandal Commission, being himself a member of a backward caste and famous for his biased statements during his political career, had played a biased role in identifying the indicators and assigning scores to them for identifying the backward castes/classes. Since a thorough investigation and survey was not made and proper criterion was not applied, the Mandal Commission's mandate to select the castes/classes cannot be accepted. Even the Commission itself had confessed that its listing of classes as socially and educationally backward was "somewhat arbitrary and had the merit only of a tenable viewpoint and no more".
10. How was the constant rate of population growth assumed and the percentage adopted ? How was 27.0% fixed straight away ? The government is expected to give consideration to the totality of reservations, including the SCs, STs, handicapped persons, ex-servicemen, displaced persons, and other special categories.

which when added to 27.0% recommended by the Mandal goes beyond 59.0%. The remaining percentage left open is so small that the students and the youth belonging to this section are bound to react and agitate particularly because these reservations act as barricades to a gainful employment.

11. The Mandal Commission report was kept lying in the limbo for ten years. When any report is dug out after such a long time, it should be updated and examined in terms of the altered needs and its lacunae, and evaluated in terms of its effects of acceptance. This is done in a given time-frame. The government that announced the acceptance of Mandal Commission's report never bothered to go through this process, with the result that with its lacunae it led to violence and agitations.
12. The Constitution lays down that a class cannot be categorized as backward when it is adequately represented in the services under the State. This task is not an easy one as statistical details are not available on this aspect, except a confused set of figures compiled on the basis of the lists of backward classes in some states.
13. One consequence that will follow the Mandal Commission report's implementation will be that since the Mandal Commission report does not divide the reservation of 27.0% further into quotas for each of the backward castes, the bulk of the 27.0% reservations will be hogged by a few castes that are more dominant among the backward castes. Even among these few dominant castes again, it will be a few families which will prosper at the cost of their unfortunate brethren. This has been experience of the reservation policies implemented earlier for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There is no limit in the Mandal Commission report on the number of members from one family who might benefit from reservation. Nor is there any economic criterion to prevent even the most affluent member of the concerned caste from availing of the reservation quota.

The question whether adequate representation is to be taken with reference to each one of the categorised backward classes is important. If the totality of backward classes is taken and it is found that a few groups have monopolised the posts to go beyond adequate representation (as is the case of Meena tribe in north India or some castes in south states), would there be social justice? If individual groups are taken and caste forms the basis of selection, is it possible to

keep a roster for 3,500 castes which may be constantly fluctuating in the representation in services ? These things should be tackled first before talking of social justice.

Some other arguments given against the Mandal Commission report are :

1. The manner of its implementation was too hasty. The people should have been prepared for its implementation as it was likely to give a feeling of deprivation to some sections. Even within the party, there was no discussion on the report. Other constituents of the National Front Government were also kept in the dark by the Janata Dal. The report was, thus, implemented without any consensus.
2. While reserving the quota for the backward classes, the economic cut off point has not been fixed. A family with an income above a certain level should not have been entitled to reservation.
3. The administrative efficiency has been imperilled in the name of concessions to backward classes. Even the Constitution maintains that the reservation shall be consistent with and not subversive to the maintenance of efficiency of the administration.
4. Reservation should have been valid only for one generation.

Thus, an unscientific study based on assumptions, fallacies, paucity of relevant data, loopholes in information, arbitrariness, subjectivity, anomalies, a high degree of generalisation, and which goes against the expert social scientists' advice needs to be treated with extreme caution. Jolted by the scale and intensity of the agitation, immolation cases of students and the criticism of the political parties, the press and the people against the thoughtless acceptance of the Mandal Report, the government came out with some proposals to defuse the crisis. It was announced (in October, 1990) that reservations will not be applied to education and to vital sectors like science, defence and top jobs. Nor will there be reservations in promotions. The report will also be not applicable to those states (like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and West Bengal) which had rejected the Mandal Report.

The youth in India have to realise that reservation policy is not a problem to fight for. The real problem is India's ruling elite and their attitudes and obscurantist notions which have corrupted the thinking of our society and brought the country to its present critical condition. Instead of fighting against the Mandal Commission's report, they have

to fight the entire political system. If they want to protect their future, if they want to be the future elite of the nation, they have to raise voice against the present corrupt and self-centred political elites. They have to widen their perspective to encompass the basic problems of our society instead of focussing on one problem of reservation for other backward castes/classes.

The issue of implementing the Mandal Commission's recommendations is now in the Supreme Court. The present Congress (I) government has now proposed (25 September, 1991) that within 27% of the Union Government civilian jobs reserved for the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) preference will be given to the 'poor sections' of such classes. As many as 10% of these jobs shall be reserved for "other economically backward sections" of the people who are not covered by any of the existing schemes of reservation.

### **The Reservation Policy**

The demand for special concessions and privileges to the under-privileged are matters of right and not of charity or philanthropy. All the commissions and the committees that have examined this issue, like the Miller Committee appointed by the erstwhile Mysore State or the Kalelkar Commission appointed in 1955 by the Government of India, have accepted the need for compensatory discrimination. Some of the courts also in hearing the cases that have come up before them have examined the issue. One Hon'ble Judge pointed out that the reservation policy has generated a spirit of self-denigration, each caste and community competing to be more backward than others. In another case, the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (Shri Chandrachud) had recommended that the reservation policy should be reviewed every five years so that the state can rectify distortions and the people—both backward and non-backward—can ventilate their views in public debates on the practical impact of the reservation policy. The question to be discussed today, therefore, is : Is reservation policy, or protective discrimination, a logical and the useful strategy for ensuring justice and equal opportunity to the economically exploited and socially oppressed groups ?

The first argument is that reservation in educational institutions and government jobs, by themselves, cannot achieve much. In fact, if extended to larger sections of the population, they can be counter productive too (S.C. Dube : September, 1990) At best, reservations are 'palliatives' and no decisive transformations can take place unless such

a measure is accompanied by structural changes in the nation's production relations, and most crucially, until land reforms become a reality, and educational support systems are so buttressed that candidates from any social groups are available for higher level jobs.

The second argument is that our country is already divided into various groups. Reservation will further divide the population artificially. Earlier, reservations were accepted under special conditions for a period of fifteen years only but continuing them for ever will produce vested interests and separatism, and will lead to a caste-war and the disintegration of the country. Sometimes back, it was ordered that caste will not be mentioned in applications for jobs. But if the reservation policy is to be continued for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward castes/classes, the applicants will have to mention their caste, otherwise how will they be known? This will fragment the Hindu society into pieces.

The third argument is that when the reservation policy was implemented after the Independence, there were only a few SC and ST people in the administrative set-up. Later on, Shri Jagjivan Ram introduced reservations even in promotions when he was the Railway Minister, so that the superiors were passed over by their subordinates belonging to SCs and STs. This not only politicised the civil services but also affected the efficiency of the administration. Just as at the time of partition of the country, the Muslim members of the administrative services were working for Pakistan and the non-Muslims for India, similarly because of the reservation policy, the officers are now working on the basis of caste and creed. If this goes on even for 10-15 years more, there will be total disruption. It is time that the beneficiaries and society should give up reservations. The society should immediately think of bringing about conditions where all jobs and admissions are decided only on merit in an open competition, in which all aspirants are assured of a fair chance.

The fourth argument is that our experience in the last 43 years has shown that the reservation policy has not delivered the desired results. The small percentage of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe representatives in Parliament and Vidhan Sabhas have not been able to adequately articulate the grievances and needs of the people of their constituencies. Reservation in jobs and in educational institutions have benefited only a few tribes (like Meenas) and a few castes (like Barwas). The reservations have also generated conflicts and tensions. The seventies and the eighties and beginning of the nineties witnessed

country-wide waves of violent protests. Budgetary allocations earmarked for the development of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were frittered away in non-essential projects that contributed little to the process of self-generating growth.

There is another school of thought which favours reservations. The supporters of this school maintain that there is a wide gulf between the social order that the people of India were promised by a political party led by Gandhiji and the one that has actually been established since Independence. The oppression of the weaker section of society (including lower and backward castes and tribes) by the stronger (upper castes) section has not ended. In fact, it has been aggravated. A new era of social justice and equality still remains a dream to be achieved. The benefits of development have been appropriated by about 20.0% of the population at the top. The English-speaking educated middle class has come to control and operate levers of state power. It has emerged as the ruling class of the country. By accepting the reservation policy, the government will only be working for the establishment of a new social order that would secure to the underprivileged sectors of our society, justice in social relations and equality of opportunity to rise in social scale.

The two institutions of democracy and planning were expected to serve as instruments for building a new India. But they failed to produce the intended results. For this failure, it is not the institutions themselves which are to be blamed, it is the way they have worked, or the way their working has been distorted by those in power. It was because of the vested interest of the middle-class upper caste which is the ruling elite that our country has a dualistic pattern of growth in which those with access to the holders of power flourish and the population at the lower level (socially and economically) is denied all the tangible gains from the development process. The Janata Dal government which included people who were committed to the welfare of the cultivators in particular and rural people in general and the backward people, attempted to remove the dissatisfaction of these people by accepting not only the Mandal Commission's report but also by announcing programmes which gave new hope to the agricultural community of our country. The new political leaders (329 members of Lok Sabha coming from rural areas and a good number from the backward and underprivileged groups) have, thus demonstratively proved their commitment to the cause of their constituents. One member, belonging to this new political force in power, even described

the measures of the Janata Dal government to face the agitation of anti-reservationists as "second phase of our freedom struggle where sharing of power is going to be a major issue".

There is one school of thought which favours reservations but wants economic need and not caste as the basis of reservation. Almost all political parties, except the Janata Dal, implicitly or overtly have supported this idea of reservation on the economic-need basis. They hold that this will help the deserving poor of all classes and castes to rise in society. The disadvantaged groups do need protection but it cannot be extended *en masse* and for all time to come. The poor should get special weightage but a watchdog body should keep an eye on their progress. As soon as it is found that they no longer need the crutches of reservations, all jobs should be declared open to all.

Whatever may be the theoretical arguments against the reservation policy, in practice reservation policy will continue to be supported by all political parties because of the electoral advantage they derive from this issue. Those political parties and political leaders who are merely fretting and fuming about the acceptance of the Mandal Commission's report by the Janata Dal government are doing so only because they think that they will not derive the electoral benefit to the same extent as their rivals. The vote banks are more important to them than the future of the country. When the ministers are making statements invoking the other backward classes to come out on the streets, will it not be an open invitation to caste war? Can these ministers and ex-ministers be considered as responsible persons capable of ruling the country?

What are the youth and the students to do then? One alternative is that instead of raising the issue of forward versus backward castes, they should raise the issue of vested interests of the political parties and leaders versus the logical interests of the youth in the society. They can propose certain amendments in the reservation policy to ensure that instead of benefit being drawn only by a few tribes, castes and families, it should benefit a large number of deserving people belonging to the backward castes. Second, there should be no compromise on quality and efficiency. Third, they have to take the students/youth of the backward classes with them on this issue and be able to convince them of their stance.

## Conclusion

If weaker sections in India are to rise in revolt because they feel that only violence permits their voice to be heard, the nation will have to

pay a very heavy price for this. Our government and our people have to give these docile people the chance of a fair deal to live with honour and self-respect. Similarly, little will be achieved by a debate on the pros and cons of reservations. It will only aggravate the problem and lead to the fragmentation of the country. The power elite, the government, the political parties and the people have to delve deeper into the very reasons why reservation has seemingly become necessary and what needs to be done to eliminate this pernicious practice.