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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT OF THE BACKWARD COMMUNITY AND THE ROLE OF MANDAL COMMISSION

# Educational, Social and Economic Upliftment of the Backward Community and the Role of Mandal Commission

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Mandal Commission plays a very significant role in the educational, social and economic upliftment of the backward community. Brief account of the Mandal Commission is as follows:-

## APPOINTMENT OF THE COMMISSION

On the 20th December, 1978, Shri Morarji Desai, the then Prime Minister of India announced on the floor of the Parliament, the decision to appoint Backward Classes Commission under the Chairmanship of Shri B.P. Mandal with four other members. The Commission started its work on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1979.

## THE COMPOSITION OF THE COMMISSION

As per powers conferred by the Article 340 of the Constitution of India, the President appointed a Backward Classes Commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India. The composition of commission was as follows :—

Shri B.P. Mandal (Ex—M.P.)	Chairman
Shri R.R. Bhole (M.P.)	Member
Shri Dewan Mohan Lal	Member
Shri L.R. Naik (Ex-M.P.)	Member
Shri K. Subramaniam	Member
Shri S.S. Gill	Secretary

Chairman and the members were appointed on part-time basis and worked in honorary capacity.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE:

To determine the criteria for defining socially and educationally backward classes.

To recommend steps to be taken for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes.

To examine the desirability or otherwise of making for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of such backward classes which are not adequately represented in public services and posts in any State.

to present to the President a report setting out of the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.

The Headquarters of the Commission were located at Delhi.

The Commission made use of the following techniques of inquiry to achieve the Terms of Reference as stated above.

1. State Government Questionnaire.
2. Questionnaire of Central Ministry/Departments.
3. Questionnaire for the general public, voluntary organization, etc.
4. Commission's Tours.
5. Evidence of a number of people's representatives, eminent public men, sociologists, journalists, demographers etc.
6. Socio—economic Field Survey
7. Case Studies
8. Analysis of Census data, village monograph and special reports.
9. Study of Legal and Constitutional Issues.

The Commission collected data through the methodology stated above.

Some of the important informations (particularly related to present study) as shown by the data collected, are as under :—

## **JOBS RESERVATION**

In the States where jobs have been reserved under Government employment and public sector undertakings for OBCs, nearly 75% of the respondents showed awareness of jobs reservation, but 65% expressed dissatisfaction with the quantum of reservation.

Regarding the steps to be taken to enhance the intake of other backward class candidates in services, 45% suggested increase in the percentage of reservation. Nearly 17% asked for caste-wise reservation of jobs and seats in educational institutions. Free educational facilities, relaxation of maximum age limit, special coaching facilities for OBC candidates appearing in competitive examinations, etc. were some of the other measures suggested in this behalf.

## **DISABILITIES SUFFERED BY OBCS**

Nearly 78 percent of the respondents stated that various types of disabilities like free access to public utilities, social discrimination, lack of educational opportunities, habitation in segregated and neglected areas, etc. were some instances of such disabilities. Only 9 percent of the replies indicated that OBCs were not subjected to any discrimination or disability.

Regarding steps taken by the respective State Governments, to remove these disabilities, nearly 43 percent were of the view that no concrete steps have been taken so far. On the other hand 17 percent felt that some steps have been taken in this direction, but one-third of these persons felt that the steps taken were neither adequate nor effective. Others acknowledged that measures like expansion of educational and employment opportunities, provision of housing facilities, etc. have helped to mitigate the hardships of OBCs.

## **ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT/EDUCATION**

Nearly 85 percent respondents felt that OBCs have to face a number of hurdles in securing employment or admission to institutions of higher education. Increase in the percentage of reservation, relaxation in upper age limit, creation of a separate ministry or a commission to protect the right of OBCs were some of the remedial measures suggested by them.

## **LITERACY**

For the promotion of literacy for the OBCs, nearly 40 percent of the respondents recommended that free and compulsory education for the children of backward classes was necessary. Nearly 12 percent wanted special adult education programmes for OBCs. Provision of employment to the educated among OBCs, assistance for higher education and vocational training, setting up of more educational institutions, provision of the free books and school uniform, as also free board and lodging and other educational facilities

on par with the SC/ST students were some of the other measures recommended for the promotion of Literacy among the OBCs.

## **ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS**

Nearly 72 percent of the respondents were aware of the existence of voluntary organizations and thought that they work for the welfare of their respective castes or classes. As regards the impact of their activities, 17 percent stated that these organizations helped only members of their own castes. Nearly 35 percent were of the view that some sort of educational, economic, social and political benefits have occurred as a result of the activities of these organisations, but another 20 percent felt that their impact has been normal.

## **SHIFT IN THE OCCUPATIONAL PATTERNS**

Regarding shift in occupational patterns, nearly 45 percent of the respondents felt that significant changes have taken place in the last few decades. Nearly 14 percent stated that these changes were for the worse and a large number of people have been rendered jobless as a result of industrialization and social change, etc. Above 35 percent of the respondents were of the view that these changes have been for the better.

## **ECONOMIC CRITERIA**

Regarding validity of the economic criterion for the identification of backwardness nearly 36 percent of the respondents were not in its favour, but 28 percent thought that backwardness was directly linked with poverty.

Keeping these important inferences in View Mandal Commission made some valuable recommendations for educational, social and economic betterment of the backward classes. These recommendations are as under:-

## **RECOMMENDATIONS OF MANDAL COMMISSION**

### **NEED FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

It may appear that the upliftment of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) 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.

## **ATTITUDE OF THE ELITE TO 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%), 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 there 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.

## **A FEELING OF PARTICIPATION:**

It is not at all our contention, that by offering a few thousand jobs to OBC candidates we shall be able to make 52 percent 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 Police, the material benefits accruing from his position are limited to the members of his family only. When no tangible benefits flow to the community at large

## **QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES:**

Apprehensions regarding drop in the quality of Government services owing to large scale induction of S.C./S.T. and O.B.C. candidates against reserved posts may be justified only up to a point. But is it possible to maintain that all 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 firsthand knowledge of the sufferings and problems of the backward sections of society. This is not a small asset for field workers and policy-makers even at the highest level.

## **INTRODUCTION OF EGALITARIANISM:**

It is not 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. 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.

## **NO HEART—BURNING:**

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 percent 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.

In fact the Hindu society has always operated a very rigorous scheme of reservation, which was Internationalised through caste system. Eklavya lost his thumb and Shambhuk his neck for their breach of caste rules of reservation. The present furore against reservations for OBCs 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.

## QUANTUM AND SCHEME OF RESERVATIONS

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes constitute 22.5 percent of the country's population. Accordingly, a pro-rata reservation of 22.5 percent has been made for them in all services and public sector undertakings 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 percent.

### OVERALL SCHEME OF RESERVATION:

With the above general recommendation regarding the quantum of reservation, the Commission proposes the following over-all scheme of reservation for OBCs:

1. Candidates belonging to OBCs recruited on the basis of merit in an open competition should not be adjusted against their reservation quota of 27 percent.
2. The above reservation should also be made applicable to promotion quota at all levels.
3. Reserved quota remaining unfilled should be carried forward for a period of three years and dereserved thereafter.
4. Relaxation in the upper age limit for direct recruitment should be extended to the candidates of OBCs in the same manner as done in the case of SCs and STs.
5. 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.

### RESERVATION IN PUBLIC SECTOR:

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.

### HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS:

All universities and affiliated colleges should also be covered by the above scheme of reservation.

### STATUTORY PROVISIONS:

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.

## CONCESSIONS IN EDUCATION

Our educational system is elitist in character; it results in a high degree of wastage and is least suited to the requirements of an over-populated and developing country.

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 as the provision of additional funds as the forming 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.

## CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Upgrading the cultural environment 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 proper 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.

A beginning on both these fronts will have to be made on a limited scale and selective basis. But the scope of these activities should be expanded as fast as the resources permit. Adult education programme and residential schools started on a selective basis will operate as growing-points of consciousness for



the entire community and their multiplier effect is bound to be substantial. Whereas several States are extended a number of adhoc concessions to backward class students, few serious attempts have been made to integrate these facilities into a comprehensive scheme for a qualitative upgradation of educational environment available to OBC students.

### **VOCATIONAL TRAINING:**

After all, education is the best catalyst of change and educating the backward classes is the surest way to improve their self image and raise their social status. 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 percent. Those States which have already reserved more than 27 percent seats for OBC students will remain unaffected by this recommendation.

### **SPECIAL COACHING FACILITIES:**

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. In fact the real task starts only after that. Unless adequate follow-up action is taken to give special coaching assistance to these students, not only these young people will feel frustrated and humiliated but the country will also be landed with ill-equipped and sub-standard engineers, doctors and other professionals.

## **INSTITUTIONAL FINANCE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Vocational communities following hereditary occupations have suffered heavily as a result of industrialization. Mechanical production and introduction of synthetic materials has robbed the village potter, oil crusher, black-smith, carpenter, etc. of their traditional means of livelihood.

It has, therefore become very necessary that suitable institutional finance and technical assistance is made available to such members of village vocational communities who want to set up small scale industries on their own. Similar assistance should also be provided to those promising OBC candidates who have obtained special vocational training.

Of course, most State Government has created various financial and technical agencies for the promotion of small and medium scale industries. But it is well known that only the more influential members of the community are able to derive benefits from these agencies. In view of this, it is very essential that separate financial institutions for providing financial and technical assistance are established for the backward classes. Some State Governments like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have already set up separate financial corporations etc. for OBCs.

### **COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES:**

Cooperative Societies of occupational groups will also help a lot. But due care should be taken that all the office-bearers and members of such societies belong to the concerned hereditary occupational groups and outsiders are not allowed to exploit them by infiltrating into such cooperatives.

### **ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT:**

The share of OBCs in the industrial and business life of the country is negligible and this partly explains their extremely low income levels. As a part of its overall strategy to uplift the backward classes, it is imperative that all State Governments, are suitably advised and encouraged to create a separate network of financial and technical institutions to foster business and industrial enterprise among OBCs.

### **STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM OF ITS ROOT:**

Reservations in Government employment and educational institutions, as also all possible financial assistance will remain mere palliatives unless the problem 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.

### NEED FOR PROPER IMPLEMENTATION:

The net outcome of the above situation is that notwithstanding their numerical preponderance, backward classes continue to remain in mental and material bondage of the higher castes and rich peasantry. Consequently, despite constituting nearly 3/4th of the country's population, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes have been able to acquire a very limited political clout, even though adult franchise was introduced more than three decades back. Through their literal monopoly of means of production of higher castes are able to manipulate and coerce the backward classes into acting against their own interests. In view of this, until the stranglehold of the existing production relations is broken through radical land reforms, the abject dependence of under privileged classes on the dominant higher castes will continue indefinitely. In fact there is already a sizeable volume of legislation on the statute books to abolish zamindari, place ceilings on land holdings and distribute land to the landless. But in actual practice its implementation has been halting, half-hearted and superficial. The States like Karnataka, Kerala and West Bengal which have gone about the job more earnestly have not only succeeded in materially helping the Backward classes, but also reaped rich political dividends into the bargain.

### RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE EXISTING RELATIONS:

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.

### ASSISTANCE FROM THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

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 under taken 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.

### MANDAL COMMISSION AND INDIAN POLITICS

#### CONGRESS (I) MANIFESTO

No mention of Mandal Commission as such, the Congress has always enjoyed the full support of backward classes. It is fully committed to their welfare and all round progress. Special programmes will be instituted to support the professional activities and occupations of the backward classes through the provision of better technologies, more generous financial assistance and better marketing. Educational concessions, including scholarships and other schemes of academic improvement, will be extended from the primary to university level to students belonging to the backward classes.

#### NATIONAL FRONT MANIFESTO

The socially and educationally backward classes will be given special opportunities and substantial reservations in employment, education and public offices will be made.

The recommendations of the Mandal Commission will be implemented expeditiously.

#### BHARTIYA JANATA PARTY MANIFESTO

In the opinion of the B.J.P. the question of reservation has to be viewed with an open mind free from all prejudices of any kind.

For this B.J.P. commends:

1. Reservation should be continued for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as before;
2. Reservation should also be made for other backward classes broadly on the basis of the Mandal Commission Report, preference to be given to the poor among these very classes;
3. As poverty is an important contributory factor for backwardness, reservation should also be provided for members of the other castes on the basis of their economic conditions.

#### GOVERNMENT POLICY

##### Statement of the Prime Minister on Mandal Commission (August 7, 1990)

The following is the text of the **suomoto** statement of Prime Minister Shri V.P. Singh in the Lok Sabha on decisions on the Mandal Commission Report.

I am happy today to announce in this august House a momentous decision of social justice that my Government has taken regarding the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes on the basis of the Report of the Mandal Commission.

Hon'ble Members are aware that the Constitution which we gave to ourselves 40 years back envisages that Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) be identified, their difficulties removed and their conditions improved in terms of Article 340(I) read with Article 15(4) as well as Article 16(4). It is a negation of the basic structure of our Constitution that till now this requirement was not fulfilled.

The Second Backward Classes Commission under the Chairman of the Late Shri B.P. Mandal which was appointed on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1979 submitted its report on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1980. In accordance with our commitment before the people we included this in our Action Plan After examining various aspects of it. I am glad to announce that my Government has taken the following decisions on the Commission's Report.

1. In order to avail ourselves of the benefit of the long experience of a number of States in preparing lists of Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) and in order to ensure harmonious and quick implementation, we have decided to adopt in the first phase the castes common to both the Mandal list as well as the State Lists.
2. The percentage of reservation for the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) will be 27.
3. This reservation will be applicable to services under the Government of India and Public Undertakings.

Hon'ble Members are aware that on 14 April, 1990 at the official function organised to celebrate the birthday of Bharat Ratna Baba Saheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar at the Ambedkar Stadium, I announced the commencement of the Ambedkar Centenary Year and designated it as the Year of Social Justice. We have taken a number of measure of social justice pertaining to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections like removal of injustice done to Neo—Buddhists vesting of constitutional status and substantial powers to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, according due but long delayed honours to Dr. Ambedkar, and so on. The present decisions are in the same line and belong to the tradition of this Government's dedication to the cause of the Scheduled Castes. Scheduled Tribes, Socially and Educationally Backward Classes and other weaker sections.

## **OFFICE MEMORANDUM ON MANDAL COMMISSION**

Recommendations of the Second Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Report) : Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes in Services under the Government of India.

In a multiple undulating society like ours, early achievement of the objective of social justice as enshrined in the Constitution is a must. The Second Backward Classes Commission called the Mandal Commission was established by the then Government with this purpose in view, which submitted its report to the Government of India on December 31, 1980.

Government have carefully considered the report and the recommendations of the Commission in the present context regarding the benefits to be extended to the socially and educationally backward classes as opined by the Commission and are of the clear view that at the outset certain weightage has to be provided to such classes in the services of the Union and their public Undertakings. Accordingly orders are issued as follows:

1. Twenty—seven percent of the vacancies in civil posts and services under the Government of India shall be reserved for SEBC.
2. The aforesaid reservation shall apply to vacancies to be filled by direct recruitment. Detailed instructions relating to the procedure to be followed for enforcing' reservation, will be issued separately.
3. Candidates belonging to SEBS recruited on the basis of merit in an open competition on the same standards prescribed for the general candidates shall not be adjusted against the reservation quota of twenty-seven percent.
4. The SEBC would comprise in the first phase the castes and communities which are common to both the list in the report of the Mandal Commission and the State Government's lists A.
5. The aforesaid reservation shall take effect from August 7, 1990. However, this will not apply to vacancies where the recruitment process has already been initiated prior to the issue of these orders.

Similar instructions in respect of public sector undertakings and financial institutions including public sector banks will be issued by the Department of Public Enterprises and Ministry of Finance respectively.

## **CRITIQUE OF THE POLICY BY CROSS SECTION OF SOCIETY**



## **MANDAL COMMISSION: DIVIDING TO RULE**

It was a decision that will live forever in infamy and become the benchmark of the descent of Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh from leader to demagogue. His announcement on August 7 - two days before Devi Lal's Kisan rally in New Delhi - that the Government would implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, was initially greeted as a master-stroke calculated to consolidate the backward castes as the new vote bank of the badly mauled Janta Dal.

That Singh was willy-nilly planting the seeds for a new political harvest became even more evident when he used the Red Fort as an electoral platform on Independence Day to reiterate his commitment to implementing the Commission's recommendations, and appealed to the Scheduled Castes and Muslims by repeated references to Ambedkar and declaring Prophet Mohammed's birthday a public holiday.

But as events unfolded during the fortnight it became clear that what Singh was trying to reap was a harvest of shame. He had been reduced, like all power-hungry politicians before him, to a vote—hungry power broker shamelessly using the two elements that have ever bloodied and divided this nation - religion and caste.

(Badhwar, Inderjit, India Today September 15, 1990)

## **QUOTA FOR WEAKER SECTIONS MUST**

Referring to the Congress leader's statement that economic status be the criterion for reservation policy. Mr. Bommai reminded Mr. Gandhi that Congress-I Governments in the South have been implementing reservation policy for the backward classes based on caste only.

Mr. Bommai said that implementation of Mandal Commission report was a must to ensure some sort of an opportunity in services for the backward classes. If the oppressed are not given the opportunity there would be bloodshed and revolution in the country.

He said that National Front Government under the leadership of Mr. V.P. Singh had taken its election promise seriously. Achievements in the first ten months was significant, but publicity to the internal differences in the party has swallowed the good work of the Government, he opined.

He further said that there was no difference of opinion among the Janata Dal leaders over the reservation issue, as was being made out by some people.

Asked about the steps his party proposed to take on the issue in the context of the BJP having expressed a different view on it. Mr. Bommai said 'we are holding discussions'.

The percentage of reservation in southern states was more than that recommended by the Mandal Commission, he said, adding, though there was a demand in the south to review it, 'reservation has been introduced only now in the northern parts of the country'. He urged students to call off their on-going agitation over the issue.

The notion that the implementation of the report would affect excellence and merit was incorrect, Mr. Bommai said, "Top ranking and meritorious students may not become good engineers, doctors, administrators, advocates and journalists", he said. How many of you are distinction or rank holders? Are you not doing a good job? he asked the gathered newsmen.

(Bommai, S.R., Indian Express, September 9, 1990)

## **MORE POLITICS THAN JOBS**

Mr. Gandhi, who was addressing the Congress-I Parliamentary Party's valedictory meeting, 'devoted most of his speech to the Government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations.

"The Prime Minister, Mr. V.P. Singh, had taken the decision in a huff. There was no proper discussion even in the Cabinet and, according to our information, the Mandal Commission was not on the agenda paper even. There were also much quibblings among the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Left parties supporting the Government from outside," Mr. Gandhi pointed out.

Describing the Government's decision to go ahead with 27 percent job reservation on the basis of the Mandal Commission report, irrespective of consequences, as a "Political Glimmick", the former Prime Minister said that by backwardness the Constitution makers meant socially and educationally backward classes and not just backward castes. But the Government had arbitrarily changed a concept well-defined in the Constitution. "Yesterday, I was shocked when during the debate on the Mandal Commission in the Lok Sabha, Mr. V.P. Singh did not get up to say that he did not believe in castes," Mr. Gandhi said.

It was shocking that the country had a Prime Minister whose actions encouraged casteism, Mr. Gandhi said reminding his party colleagues that "Caste is a cancer in our society".

Spelling out the Congress-I's stand on job reservations issue, Mr. Gandhi said : "We are for helping the weakest and the poorest among backwards. The Congress-I was never against the reservations but it was opposed to the proposal to define caste as the sole factor for determining the economic backwardness. The Mandal Commission had used the economic factor to identify castes but it

had not used the economic factor to go beyond caste.

Mr. Gandhi said it was worth noticing that the Constitution had defined backwardness in class terms and not backwardness in caste terms. He called upon his party men to ensure that the caste system was eradicated from society and the country moved towards a casteless society.

The Congress-I men and women should go to people and tell them that the advantage of reservations should not go to the privileged and vested interests, Mr. Gandhi said adding that "assistance should be given to the truly poor people, to the landless, to people falling in the poorest category."

He particularly asked MPs belonging to Backward Classes to go to the rural areas and tell people "what Mr. V.P. Singh is doing is a total fraud on backward classes and what the other backward classes needed is educational and financial assistance."

(Gandhi, Rajiv, Hindustan Times, September 8, 1990)

## **CREATING NEW TENSIONS**

The decision of the V.P. Singh Government to extend caste-based reservations by another 27 percent on the basis of the Mandal Commission Report is motivated primarily by partisan and electoral considerations. It is neither rational nor national. It has created new tensions in society, in addition to the growing discontent caused by rising prices and failure of the Government to tackle the vital issues of Kashmir and Punjab. As a result, Prime Minister V.P. Singh has lost credibility and his minority Government has become shaky.

Reservation of any kind based on birth, caste or religion cuts at the roots of democracy and spirit of Indian Constitution. It creates vested interest in backwardness, casteism and communalism. It, as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the best friend of the depressed, himself admitted, is not even in the best interests of its immediate beneficiaries because it destroys their self-confidence. He himself told me that the Scheduled Caste people would not be able to stand on their legs so long as they depended on the crutches of reservation. That is why he advocated total abolition of caste-based reservations in the manifesto of the Republican Party that he founded.

Now that a false step has been taken, Mr. V.P. Singh must show the moral courage to admit his mistake and take steps to minimise its mischief. These steps are:

The backwardness of people must not be mixed up with their caste. There can be rich and poor in a family and every caste. The emphasis should be on the economic rather than the caste factor.

The criterion for economic backwardness must be fixed and those who fulfil them may be given reservation for some time.

Those from the depressed castes, who have improved their lot and have begun rubbing shoulders with the so-called forward people, should be taken out of the purview of the reservation so that the benefits of reservation may reach the really needy and the backward among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Survey has shown that the benefits of reservation to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes have been cornered by some families in every State.

Because of our faulty economic policies and association of caste with birth, a big chunk of our society has remained backward educationally and economically. Many steps should be taken to ameliorate the lot of society. The most important of them is provision of equal facilities for higher and professional education.

As things are, the higher rungs of public services of India are being monopolised by families which can afford to send their wards to costly English medium public schools. Such schools must either be abolished or provision must be made for at least 50 percent admission in such schools for children from educationally, economically and socially backward segments of society. The aim should be to pull up the backward and bring them on par with more fortunate elements of society.

The policies being adopted by the V.P. Singh Government will only perpetuate backwardness by creating a vested interest in remaining backward and discourage competition and merit. That will make India a second-rate country, encourage brain drain and further undermine efficiency of administration.

There must be an extensive public debate on the effect of reservation on the basis of past experience and means and methods that should be adopted to pull up the really backward. Any hasty decision taken primarily for electoral gains will prove counter-productive. Even Janata Dal may not get the electoral mileage that it has in mind.

The Mandal Commission Report must be scrutinised in depth by a committee of eminent sociologists, economists and jurists before any steps are taken to implement its recommendations.

(Madhok, Balraj)

Thus we see that the recommendations of Mandal Commission were opposed by some politicians on certain grounds, but a majority of them including Government and public both supported the recommendations as made by Mandal Commission

for educational, social and economic upliftment of the backward community. Reservation to backward community in different fields should continue and opportunities for their development should be provided in access.

Agitations against reservation of the backward classes in education and employment etc. are merely politics motivated, general public has nothing to do with it.

Education among the backward community is the best way out of the backwardness in backward classes. Shri H.R. Khanna had rightly observed in Hindustan Times dated September 14, 1990.

“Let us give the best of education to those in backward classes, apart from the general education to the children born in those classes. Let us give them abundant financial aids to pursuer their studies and encourage them by giving large number of scholarships and other encouragements. It would be a proud day in the history of our country if we can produce a number of Ambedkars in different fields on the strength of their own talent and merit. That would be the best way to uplift the members of the backward classes. The backwardness of these classes is a great stigma on our national policy.

The best way to amend the wrong done to these sections of the society is to give to the children of the backward classes proper education from the very start and afford them all facilities for higher education, apart from improving the living standard of those classes and not by undermining the efficiency in different departments of our State PUNJAB”

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