

CASTE MERIT AND RESERVATIONS

ISHWARI PRASAD

SUNIL

JASVIR SINGH



PC

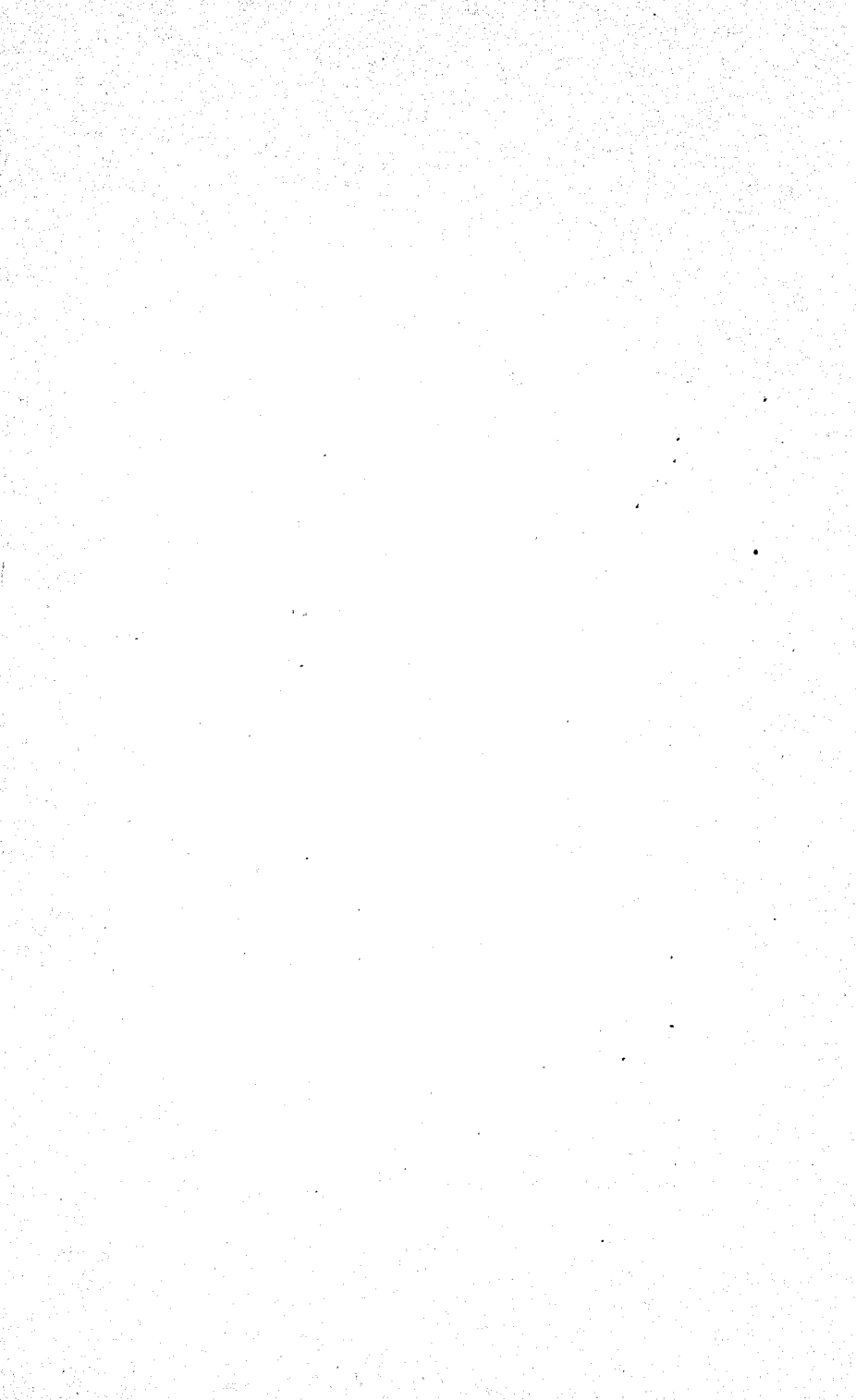
501.4494954

PRA

Samata Era Publication

New Delhi

1987



Caste Merit and Reservations



Ishwari Prasad
Jasvir Singh
Sunil



Samata Era Publications
New Delhi
1987

LIBRARY 282070
Acc.No. _____
Acc. by. 6/1/97
Date _____
Class by _____
Sub Heading by _____
Enter by _____
Transcribed by _____



© Samata Era, 1987
Editor : G.K.C. Reddy

PC
301.44740954
IRA

Price : Rs. 5.00

Printed at Shaanti Art Press, 222/B Shahpur Jat New Delhi-110016,
and Published by G.K.C. Reddy for Samata Era Publications,
H-29 Jangpura Extn., New Delhi 110014

CONTENTS

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----|
| 1. Editor's Note | ... | 5 |
| 2. Caste—A Reality | — <i>Samata Era Team</i> ... | 9 |
| 3. Merit—A Myth | — <i>Sunil/Jasvir Singh</i> ... | 15 |
| 4. Need for Reservation | — <i>Ishwari Prasad</i> ... | 28 |



EDITOR'S NOTE

The goal of our freedom struggle was not only to dethrone the British rulers and to replace them with Indians but also the transformation of Indian society free from exploitation, oppression injustice, inequality, hunger and disease. The leaders of the freedom movement were aware of the gross social-injustice and discrimination against the lower castes. That was the reason why the constitution of India not only held out a promise to secure socio-economic and political justice to all its citizen but it also contains some special provisions for promoting and safeguarding the socio-educational and economic interests of the lower castes, religious minorities and women.

However, today the majority of Indians are living under sub-human conditions and the independence which we got around forty years ago is still a dream for them. It has not removed the misery, socio-economic inequalities, injustice, exploitation, hunger and disease from among the majority of Indian people even though almost all top posts in politics, business, industry, trade, commerce, academics and the bureaucracy are being held by the "meritorious and efficient" people of the upper castes ever since independence.

A major section of those who are living in sub-human conditions belongs to Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other Backward Castes (BC) and constitute more than 75 per cent of India's population. Traditionally these people who are called lower castes (SC, ST & BC) were assigned manual and 'dirty work' and the upper castes reserved for themselves 'decent' jobs of politics, religion, administration, industry, education, trade and commerce and it is continuing even today. The wage structure is against the people of lower castes doing manual work and the difference between their one hour's labour with those of doing "mental work" is sometimes more than 200 times.

The promise for social justice and equality, which the constitution of India hold, is being shattered in the post-independence

India by the vested interests in the name of "merit and efficiency" and "equal opportunities for all". The society is beset with inequality, injustice and exploitation, which were supposed to be banished once the foreign rule was over. But India after 40 years of independence is still an unjust and unequal society. The victims of this unequal and unjust system are mainly the members of the lower castes. The caste system and practice of untouchability has not only debarred the lower castes from entering the administration and education but has also debased large masses into less than human beings.

The only way to make these people equal (if the goal is equality) is to level them through reservations which is the only peaceful means to create conditions for social equality. The opposition to reservation on the grounds to "provide equal opportunities to all" is actually to perpetuate inequality. To talk of formal equality when there is actual inequality will only perpetuate this inequality. That is why the provision for reservations was enshrined in the constitution as a means to uplift lower castes which for historical reasons, were kept socially and economically backward and which still continue to be haunted by caste prejudices.

Only increase in employment & educational opportunity will not help the lower castes.

The struggle for social equality has to be fought on two fronts : (1) fight for proportional reservations in present employment and educational opportunities for lower castes; and (2) fight for more employment and educational opportunities. Saying that all should fight for more educational and employment opportunities is like the old capitalist slogan that worker should produce more so that all should get minimum necessities of life. But everyone knows that increased national production will not help the havenots unless there is just and equitable distribution. Similarly by saying that the lower castes should fight for more educational and employment opportunities, we will directly be helping the upper castes to maintain their stranglehold on these increased opportunities.

It is not that national production has not increased in the last 40 years. In fact it has increased many times but because of unequal and unjust distribution, a small section of the population is living in luxury whereas the majority are living under sub-human conditions. Same way employment and educational opportunities have increased many times since independence but almost all these have been grabbed by the upper castes. So the talk of fight for more educational and employment opportunities will help only in increasing upper caste dominance. All those people who want social justice and equality have to fight first for equitable distribution of present educational and employment opportunities and then to fight for more educational and employment opportunities.

The above argument can be explained by another example. On the one hand food production in India has increased from 50.8 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 150.5 million tonnes in 1985-86 and today our granaries are full and in fact we are exporting food grains. On the other hand millions of our people are undernourished and are not in a position to get sufficient food to meet their daily needs (according to FAO around 201 million people in India are undernourished) because they do not have the 'purchasing power' to buy food grains. This shows that in the present structure, increased educational and employment opportunities alone will not help the lower castes because, they will not be having appropriate 'merit' of getting these increased opportunities.

In this way if there is no reservation no one knows when these lower caste people will get opportunities in education and employment equal to their population proportions. But if there is proportionate reservation for SC & STs according to their population they will get proportionate representation according to their population in Class-I Central Government services, in 160 years. As is seen from the equation below :

$$\begin{aligned} \text{SC \& ST has got 5.88\% share in Class-I jobs} &= 40 \text{ years} \\ \text{SC \& ST will get 23.5\% share in Class-I jobs} &= \frac{40 \times 23.5}{5.88} = 160 \end{aligned}$$

The population of SC & ST is around 23.5 per cent of India's population and reservation for them in Central Government services is also around 23%. It took 40 years for them to get 5.88% share in Class-I Central Government services.

Similarly other backward castes for whom there is no reservation in Central government services have got 4.69% share in Class-I services of the Central Government in the last 40 years. If it continues in this way it will take 450 years for them to get 52% share in Class-I central government services which is their due share. One can see from the following equations :

OBC got 4.69% share in Class-I Government service in = 40 yrs

OBC will get 52% share in Class-I Govt. service = $\frac{40 \times 52}{4.69} = 450$ yrs

So if this system of 'merit and efficiency' continues the Backward caste people will get proportionate share of their population in Class-I Central Government services in nearly 450 years.

Therefore merit cannot be the sole criterion in the matter of finding even opportunities for all castes and communities in India.

Moreover the goal of any civilised society is generally to make all its citizen able and efficient and raise the level of merit and efficiency in all sections of society. If a section of society is not upto the general standard of merit and efficiency because of some historical reasons, appropriate environment and opportunities should be created to raise the level of merit and efficiency in all sections of society. This is more true for a country like India (if we think that it is a civilised country) where more than 75 percent people have been declared unmeritorious and useless for many centuries.

It is hoped that this small booklet—CASTE, MERIT AND RESERVATION—will help those political activists and social scientists who are engaged in the struggle for building a new society free from oppression, inequality, discrimination and backwardness to rethink on the whole issue of social equality in a caste structured society that is India.

Caste : A Reality

(Samata Era Team)

Caste is a fundamental reality in India even today. For the last few centuries Indian society has remained rigidly fixed within the framework of Varna system and the Indian mind is under strong influence of the ideology derived from caste system which assigns a person's status by birth. But our upper caste friends say that caste is a relic of the past, and in a modern democratic set-up caste has lost its relevance and the industrialisation and modernisation is breaking the age old caste structure. Our Marxist intellectuals would like to tell us that, "the changes in production relations, both in the industrial and agrarian sectors, arising from capitalist development, have brought about fundamental changes, realignments, social attitude and behavioural norms, within the caste system" they will like to inform us that, "Only the blind can fail to see the violent shake-up that the caste system has undergone, especially during the last 6 or 7 decades".

Is caste system decaying in the Indian society? Is caste giving way under the impact of modern education and industrialisation? There are many who thought and still think that the caste system will wither away with modernisation, urbanisation and westernisation. Many sociologists and theoreticians consider caste as an anachronistic feudal institution of the past relic of irrational behaviour, and hoped that the growth of capitalism would bring an end to it. After India became independent and adopted a democratic system with adult franchise many expected that the nation will become free of the evil of casteism.

However, caste belied all these expectations. Caste continues to operate as effectively as ever, perhaps more. Urbanisation and industrialisation have brought changes only in some norms of external behaviour such as in untouchability. But the chief cementing factor for the caste is the marriage system. And people

Merit : A Myth

—Sunil, Jasvir Singh

Of late the issue of merit has been the subject of a nationwide debate during the reservation controversy. A lot of hue and cry was raised about setback to merit because of reservations for weaker sections. It was argued that the meritorious were being denied their due in order to promote the incompetent and because of this administrative standards were plummeting and corruption was shooting up. Similarly the hypothesis of "merit" is embedded in our educational system. The "New Education Policy" also talks a lot about "model" school and colleges to facilitate the growth of merit. But what is "merit" and how is it determined?

One stock assumption prevailing in the society defines merit strictly on the basis of marks obtained in an examination— whoever obtains higher marks than the rest or most others is most or more competent—totally disregarding the modes through which the marks may have been obtained. This also does not take into account whether the particular examination is a test of merit at all. Whoever gets a first class is meritorious and whoever could not is not. Those who qualify in the civil services examination alone are competent enough to administer the country. Only those who scramble ahead of others in entrance tests are fit for higher or technical education. Examination and brazen competitions rule the roost and they alone determine what is called merit.

But are these competitions and examinations really as open and objective and unbiased as they are made out to be? Our society is an immensely unequal society wherein opportunities to most of the sections are sought to be stifled in various ways and in this case the whole concept of these examinations actually turns out to be a capitalist logic designed to perpetuate the prevailing inequalities. Whoever is more powerful will arrogate more facilities and privileges—law of the jungle. Will a race between a physically fit and a lame be a fair competition? Some instances clearly demonstrate as to how these so-called competitions and examinations are heavily tilted in favour of the privileged sections of the society.

Need For Reservations

ISHWARI PRASAD

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi.

A debate is going on in the country on the advisability of the policy of reservation. There are four main trends of arguments on this issue. The first is that reservation is against the interest of Indian society because of being discriminatory. The second is that reservation is not an undesirable scheme but it must base on some secular criteria like economic. The third is that reservation is of course a right scheme for SC and ST but dangerous if granted to other backward castes. And the fourth is that the policy of reservation is an essential course to achieve social parity in education and administration and must rest on caste criteria. Without going in details of all these diverse arguments, we argue here as to why preferential treatment to SC, ST and OBC of society is a right course if Indian society wishes to achieve social equality under a democratic set up.

For any debate on the policy of reservation, it is necessary that the essence of caste system in India, the goal of Indian society and the objectives of reservation must be understood. Indian society has inherited a social system, called the caste system, in which the power generating structures are controlled by those who happen to be born in upper castes. The lower castes must not have any stake in the management of society. Traditionally, this was maintained through the ideology of purity and pollution. History is the witness that the economic and political phases have been assimilated within the system of caste because of the amazing resilience inherent in the caste system. This is a powerful force of stagnation of the nation. Even in the modern times, though some formal features of the caste system have changed, the basic ingredients of the system, in terms of "we—they" consciousness, instead

Sri Bhagwat Dayal Sharma, former Governor of Madhya Pradesh, while speaking in Bhopal at a function organised by the local doctors on December 1, 1983. Said :

"We committed the mistake of reservation in the beginning. Now we are continuing the mistake. Initially the provision was made for 10 years to bring the backward classes on par with the rest. Thereafter it was extended for another 10 years. Now no one wants to annoy them for the sake of votes" .. "Because of reservation, you are grooming doctors who will help in reducing the population of the country."