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There was no segregation among these castes and they all lived together, while the people belonging to the fifth caste alone lived far away from the main stream. Though these people were called untouchable and made to live a life of segregated isolation. They did not remain in the Hindu religious fold resisting centuries of temptation which the Muslim rule offered; nor were they deterred by their threats. They seem to have preferred to remain at the bottom of the Hindu society than to go up in social stature by embracing an alien religion. Not that there were no exceptions; but this is true in the case of the majority of them, whose numbers exceeded one - sixth of India's population when Gandhiji affectionately called them the Harijans - the people of God. Evidently these are the people who needed rehabilitation, people who had lived for centuries in ignorance and poverty, putting up with untold miseries, hardship and humiliation. The framers of our constitution took notice of their plight and made some constitutional provisions for their upliftment. When the foreign Muslims invaded India their first aim was to plunder the native wealth that they might carry it home.

Their other ambition was to convert the non-believers into believers by persuasion or persecution. Even if we do not approve of their fanaticism and lack of understanding of the essential spirit of religion, we cannot denounce them as ill noticed. At best we can dub them as misguided. But the later invaders too could not give up these religious ambitions, though many of them adopted this new country as their own. But the case of the English invaders was different.

At no point of time they were in a mood to settle down here. Their only aim, after they became the rulers of the land, was to make their rule perpetual.

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With this in mind, they introduced various projects and procedures. Their education policy was to keep the nation socially servile while their 'divide and rule' was to secure their political end. In the North where there were big chunks of Muslim areas, it was the Hindu-Muslim, in the south; it was the Brahmin non Brahmin card.

The result of this policy did not end with the partition of the country, but it was the beginning of a new threat that nobody had expected the country would face. A province that had, a few years ago put forth a stiff resistance for its division, meekly submitted to its partition, which only suggests that the two nation theory has become a stronger force of division than the unifying bonds of language culture or ethnicity. Till 1947, the Indian Muslims had no other place to call their own. Now they can turn to west with an irrepressible joy and satisfaction for, had there been, a Muslim majority somewhere in other parts of India for example in Hyderabad, these Muslims here too, would have become Pakistanis.

This was one reason why the Hindus have started looking at the Indian Muslims with suspicion. This suspicion has become, more or less, true, when Kashmir fought for and succeeded in getting a special status. And Pakistan which owes its origin to religion looks with covetous eyes, wherever there is a large Muslim population and wants to annex it by hook or crook. If it had not been for the local Muslim sympathy and support, the Kashmir issue would not have become such a big problem now. Thus the calamity in Kashmir is the outcome of the political reservation policy of the Government of India. If Kashmir could enjoy a special status why not Punjab or Assam?

When Kashmir is, surely Punjab must be for Punjabis and Assam for Assamese alone.

And so the problem has thus intensified. That was perhaps the reason why Jawaharlal Nehru was reluctant to accept to the formation of Andhra Pradesh on language basis until it became inevitable when Potti Srimulu died of his fast unto death. But in the south another experiment was being conducted. The D. M. K Government has embarked on a new system of reservation for government jobs 19% for SCs and STs; 50% for other backward communities listed out by the government of Tamilnadu and the remaining 31% for open competition in which all can take part irrespective of their caste. There was not much of an opposition to this policy here, though there was a voice of dissent here and there.

The forward community people knew fully well that here in this state where Lord Rama's idol was carried in a procession, being beaten with chappais, there was nothing they could do but put up silently. At any rate the government job is not such a heaven to covet as the one aim of one's life. But this is not how people reacted when Mandal Commission's scheme was brought out from the racks for implementation. Its total reservations for all castes put together including the SCs and STs don't exceed what we have in Madras. Besides, V. P.

Singh offered to set apart 5% of the total Central Government jobs for the weaker sections of the upper class people. He says the reservation for the backward castes is based on social justice that has been denied for centuries and it is high time they were given their due share in the administrative set

up of the country which he thinks is the compensation pocket for their suffering. There is nothing wrong in making amends to an injustice. But, at a time when we decry the caste system, is it right to perpetuate it in the name of reservations? In these days when, wealth alone is honoured and respected, a poor man whether he is in the upper caste or lower caste, he alone deserves a helping Stand. When it is the shortest way to close the ranks, to think of other means that widens the gaps is like opening Pandora's Box.

An I. A. S. officer will never accept an assistant in his office as his prospective son-in-law even if he belongs to his own community. In this changing system when two classes alone are emerging out - the haves and have nots, and when all people are forgetting other distinctions, it is prudence to let them do so and if possible it is better to narrow the gap between the two new castes. To do it the policy of reservations is not the way out. Thus the reservations that began, as a small sapling, for the sake of S.

Cs and S. Ts, have grown into a gigantic tree threatening the very structure of the nation. We now have religious reservations, caste reservations, race reservations (Anglo Indians) and community reservations. No wonder if, in course of time, we have MPs and MLAs, Ministers and Judges, Chief Ministers, Prime Ministers, Presidents and Commanders - all on the basis of reservation.