

Political they passed
such laws which
injected



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Political power, economic prosperity and social status were the exclusive privilege of the upper castes. This peculiar discriminatory caste system in India led to the growth of only a section of the society dominating the rest of the populace by depriving them of economic opportunities and equal privileges. This led to the lack of unity among the Hindus who were divided into the Harijans, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Backward Classes and depressed Classes. All these sections of the Hindu society attribute the existence of their poverty to their exploitation by the upper castes that deprived them of equal opportunities in pursuing education and engaging in professions of their choice.

Such customs and practices were evolved which gradually took the form of declared and undeclared law. This facilitated of the maintenance of caste distinctions and preservation as well as continuation of perpetual poverty and servile position of the rest of the castes, other than the so-called upper classes. The British rulers in India realized the inherent weakness in social structure of India. Taking advantage of this, they passed such laws which injected the communal venom into the body politics in India. They created hatred among the Muslims and the Hindus and provided for separate electorates for Muslims by the Minto- Morley Reforms of 1919. Similarly, the 1919 Montague-Chelmsford Reforms continued to maintain separate electorates for the Muslims.

This was, later, extended to other minority communities like Christians, Sikhs and Anglo- Indians. Thus the present caste politics originated during the British rule itself with reservation of seats for various communities. Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar signed the Poona pact, according to it,

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although separate electorates were not granted to the Scheduled Castes seats, were reserved for them, which gave birth to the creation of joint electorates. Realizing the grievances of the backward classes, Dr.

Ambedkaras Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, provided adequate scope for reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes. A law was passed to preserve the rights granted to the Scheduled Castes and also to remove the notorious custom of untouchability. Thus the caste factor became an important item of political agenda.

Reservations were introduced for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes to protect their interests. Seats were reserved in. educational institutions and in job opportunities. Reservation in educational institutions became essential as the Scheduled caste people had been deprived of the right of acquiring knowledge and education since long and it would be impossible for them to compete with the upper classes. Moreover, reserved constituencies were formulated to grant them adequate representation in political setup.

Article 334 of the Constitution makes a provision for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and nomination of Anglo-Indians for a period of fifty years from the commencement of the Constitution. Thus, caste-based politics have become an integral part of the Indian polity. The reservation policy is seriously resented by the upper caste Hindus. The caste system is responsible for social stratification and class distinctions. Caste-based politics cannot be wiped out due to peculiar social structure of India. Reservations, which is known as “ Protective discrimination” is termed as ‘ Reverse Discrimination’ by the upper Caste Hindus.

The basic problem which led to the growth of communal politics in India is the discrimination against Harijans who were exploited for centuries and deprived of basic economic and social rights. Taking advantage of this the political parties resort to caste manipulations and caste appeals for gaining political leadership and to win elections. After the elections, the ruling political party is least bothered to know whether the benefits have reached the backward classes or not.

There are constant complaints in various states. Reservation quotas in jobs and educational institutions have not been maintained. It may be recalled that the partition of India and creation of Pakistan was based on caste considerations; there is no change in the mental attitude of the people even now. The elections in India are conducted by taking into consideration mainly the caste factor.

The Muslims have always felt aliens in the Hindu majority areas. They are ever willing to cooperate with parties which are pro-Muslim and continue to foster and develop an anti-Hindu attitude. Then there is a growth of caste-based political parties like Jharkhand Party, Dalit Panthers, Bhartiya Janata Party, Akali Dal, etc. Each such party tries to win the elections by luring voters in the name of caste and religion. Some political parties have tried to brand themselves as the pioneers of reservations while some have emerged as harbingers of Hindutva.

Thus reservation has led to the emergence of two rival political systems in India. Socially speaking, reservations for scheduled castes, Tribes and backward classes is regarded as essential because it is a form of social

justice granted to those who have been deprived of basic economic and educational rights for centuries. However, the caste Hindus feels that it is vindictive -in nature precipitating communal hatred. This has led to more animosity between the pro-reservationists and anti-reservationists. The upper castes feel those reservations and other concessions and privileges granted by political parties from time to time; result in brain drain as well as injustice to meritorious students in the educational field. As the upper castes, in spite of their hard work, are deprived of employment, their economic growth will be stunted and retarded.

Another recent development was the Mandal Commission Report on reservation for backward classes. It came under sharp criticism and protest, and students committed self-immolation protesting against its implementation. The anti- reservation campaigns demand for uttrakhand and demolition of the Babri Masjid depict the eruption of divisive forces caused by reservation policy and communalism.

The Supreme Court's verdict on different petitions against reservations has laid down the rule that the percentage of reservations should not exceed 50 percent. However, in Tamilnadu it was increased to 69 percent and in Karnataka to about 73 percent. The Supreme Court had tried in the earnest sense to provide reservations only to those backward classes who are in need of it by eliminating the so-called creamy layer from the privilege of enjoying reservation. But on the other hand, all other communities other than Scheduled Castes. Tribes and Backward classes are trying to procure the same privilege under the label of other backward classes (OBCs). Thus people belonging to various castes and sub-castes in India are trying to inter

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into the arena of reservations. So the politics of reservations in ending discrimination or perpetuating discrimination due to various trends in recent times cannot be definitely determined.

Let us think clearly and hope that the purpose of reservations will be ultimately to extend reservations only to uplift the really backward classes irrespective of caste or creed and to establish a secular, casteless, socialist and egalitarian society.