

When a delegation of Congress party ministers to demand more succor to the drought-hit. The Prime Minister too has taken it seriously

up to answer, the Congress led opposition creates a racket to stall the proceedings with the result that the presiding officers of both the

BJP has to do much more damage control. The Opposition plans to take it around the country

Minister Keshubhai Patel, resigning from the cabinet.

Do we still need reservation?

Reversing historical inequality by means of a new inequality does not lead to equality, says Jayant Bhandari

One of the interesting aspects of the life in our school in 1980s in Bhopal was that it was linguistically, castewise and religion-wise so mixed that it was almost impossible to have a divisive attitude. If some thought ever came against a certain section of society, it was automatically suppressed by the general indifference over it. In fact, most of us had no clue — and this is true — about what caste system was; apart from what we knew superficially by rote learning from the textbooks. Whenever we talked about different languages or religions, it was with a sense of adventure.

Later it was time to go to the university. There we were given, for the first time, a practical casteist education. We were segregated into divisions of "general", SC/ST (schedule caste/schedule tribe), etc. The culprit was no other than the Government and its so-called policies of "preferential" treatment for SC/ST and many other segments of society. Then came Mr VP Singh's Mandal proposal, which worsened things.

The cutting percentage requirement for admission to the university for the "general" category was about 70 per cent, whereas for



those from the SC/ST it was 20 per cent. In the university, we were forced into working in groups with people who were mixed in terms of caste, without heed for the need to mix them on the basis of their competencies. Also, our communist-minded warden ensured that the

rooms were shared with people of different castes. People were now forced to live and work in groups not quite necessarily intra-compatible; and by no means did this do any good to the self-image of those who could not cope up. By its very working such ways inculcated

a divisive attitude.

We soon figured out that a small quarrel with anyone from SC/ST community could land us in jail without warrant. We preferred to stay away from "them". The mental segregation was complete. Our innocent minds were taught to think in terms of caste. We were corrupted by the so called honesty and equality-minded politicians.

While a lot of SC/STs, given their poor educational background, failed to comply with the requirements of the examination procedure, they were nudged up under political pressure. It was no big deal for many SC/STs to take up to 20 years to complete a 5-year course of engineering.

Then came Government jobs. The stories of dehumanising experiences of people floated around. There were again reservations in jobs. Your junior was promoted above you because he was from SC/ST. In real terms it meant that people from "general" category had to be scared of SC/STs while at jobs.

Most of our real experiences were such that reservation did little to promote equality. In fact, it went all the way against it. The SC/ST people, who were supposed-

ly given such power, considered themselves superior to not only "their own" people but also lavished the feeling of power over the people from the "general" category when they could.

Times have changed; it has got worse. Reservation has now been extended to include certain seats in politics. And now perhaps soon for women. The truth is it is not easy to say the above. It's all politically incorrect. If you oppose reservation for SC/ST, you are a casteist. If you oppose reservation for people who are children of people in the Armed forces, you are anti-nationalist. If you oppose reservation for women, you are a sexist.

The reality is that reversing historical inequality by means of a new inequality does not lead to equality. To let people grow you should provide all the facilities but above all you should treat them as respectable, responsible individual; the means should justify the results intended. Providing reservation is condescending at best. This leads to what we have: *A mai-bap sarkar*, a beggar mentality in people, a corrupting influence that fundamentally demeans people and their mental freedom; even if they seemingly win.

Road from Rio led to nowhere

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