CHAPTER - VII

MODERNIZATION: A PERSPECTIVE IN RELIGION AND UNTOUCHABILITY

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE GOVERNMENTAL AND WELFARE AGENCIES

(PART B)

(i) Outlook of the sample on the policy of reservation and welfare programmes:

We are confronted with the most important and burning problem of the day. In the post independence India, the constitutional authorization for preference for backward classes created a lot of confusion and conflict leading to the court cases, appointment of commissions, and public discussions.

In the present study, in an attempt to explore the opinion of the respondents that how the educational equality, job equality among the members of the different caste can be achieved, some items related to this aspect were included in the scale. The responses to these items are expected to reveal the views of the respondents about the government policy of job reservation and reservation in education and politics and the impact of this attitude in society in general.
In order to ascertain the respondents outlook on the policy of the reservation, certain questions were asked during their interviewing process. These items were taken from the study of Singhi which was done in 1979.

1. Whether the respondents thought that the policy of reservation had actively helped people of the scheduled castes to secure jobs. The responses are as follows: 53.34% of the respondents thought that the policy helped to a large extent, 39% thought that it was true only for jobs in the government, 9.67% said that they do not know.

2. Whether they thought the policy of reservation had fulfilled a useful purpose. 79% Thought it had not fulfilled, 14.67% thought it had, 17.33% said they do not know.

3. Furthermore, the respondents were asked if they thought that the members of the scheduled castes had advanced so much that they can stand on their own in open competition with others and thus, did not need a system of reservation any more. 44.38% Said they can stand, 44.72% said they can not stand, 13.90% said they do not know.
Furthermore, the respondents were probed on these statements. In their opinion it is correct to say that scheduled caste members had not advanced so much that they can stand on their feet but reservation is not the only solution.

Respondents were inquired if they considered the programmes on the whole beneficial. 62.57% considered them beneficial, 29.95% considered them not beneficial, 7.48% said that they did not know.

It is true that the programmes have benefitted the members of the scheduled caste but the main question is the quality and nature of benefits and moreover, the question is of their adverse effects.

Our observational data show that the antireservation agitation in 1981 and 1985 in Gujarat were due to the middle class reaction against reservation of seats, which they thought would soon deprive them of opportunities and jobs in Government and professional institutions. If the price-hike continues, the feeling of deprivations is sure to spread among the middle class.

The bright and intelligent ward of a middle class family is not selected in competitions while schedule caste candidates are selected at lower marks in the reservation quota. The problem is not limited to this only. When the
time for promotion comes, the reserved quota candidates get promotion while meritorious ones are sidelined. It will thus, surely breed resentment.

Out of 300 respondents, 55 respondents were from the scheduled castes families. These respondents were asked about their experiences regarding reservation policy. It is in their knowledge that certain posts in the government and in the education are reserved for the members of the scheduled castes. Out of 55 respondents, 49 respondents gave affirmative answers.

It is observed that only the best part of them, try to corner the fruits for the development for self and their families. They trade their influence for personal and family advantages rather than for achieving anything for the community as a whole. They remain alienated from the common people of their community and the result is that the underdeveloped remain when they are.

Thus, it can be concluded on the basis of the views of the respondents, as well as on the observation of the researcher, that if this policy continues indiscriminately, it will lead to perpetuation of caste and off-set the formation of classes cutting across caste barriers. It would also delay the process of modernisation. This controversy has resulted in aggravation of caste
conflicts leading to caste riots.

The following items were included in the attitudinal scale of this study. In view of the 77.34% respondents, reservation is not the solution of educational equality. 84% respondents viewed that reservation policy has increased social distance between lower caste and upper caste. 72.67% respondents agreed with the statement that due to reservation policy there remains a great difference of intelligence between scheduled caste students and others. 64.67% respondents believe that scheduled caste students are not well behaved and unable to cope with higher society. Those respondents who disagreed with the statement mostly were from the scheduled castes only.

In the opinion of the respondents, if the government is so concerned about the welfare of the particular section of the downtrodden communities their economic uplift should be the primary aim. 83% respondents of the present study think that high class Hindus had illtreated the Harijans, therefore, they must make amends for their wrong doings. 77% respondents believe that economic aid should be given to untouchables so that they can live like others. They are in favour of giving special scholarships and books aid to the untouchable students. However, 97.34% respondents viewed that economic help should not only be given to those who are untouchables
but to all those who are poor irrespective of caste considerations.

96.67% respondents believe, that in order to raise the educational status of the untouchables, schooling should be compulsory in the childhood in which some education regarding social manners and habits should be given.

Discussions on the above points led us to believe that government should look into this controversy and see to it that if a person of one generation has reaped the fruits of the reservation policy, no member of his family be allowed to draw benefits in the next generation. Reservation should be based on the economic position of an individual rather than that of a community as a whole. We have to exclude the well to do families of the backward castes and include the poorer families of the other castes.

An assessment of the view of the respondents on the programmes as whole reveal that there has been much criticism of the programmes which provide special privileges to the members of the scheduled castes. Majority of the this sample suggests that by providing these privileges to members of the lower caste, we are depriving a large part of society who at the individual level may well be more backward economically as well as socially than many. They argue
that any scheme of privileges should be based upon a rational criterion of specific needs of specific individual rather than a scheme which provides privileges to a community as a whole. 78.67% respondents argue that this scheme is politically motivated as it becomes a clever manipulative device for securing political support from these sections en bloc.

(ii) Reservation and agitations: These views of the respondents can be thought of as representative of the entire modern generation. In connection with the recent trouble in Gujrat and Madhya Pradesh concerning reservation of seats in jobs as well as in education, similar views were expressed by students (India Today, April 1985).

"The outright reservation of seats for a particular community is reason enough in itself for social contentment that prevails, as it deprives more deserving candidates of their legitimate right on an undemocratic pretext. Such policies sound like absurd anachronisms in the 20th century."

The majority of our respondents have opined that the facilities and reservation should be given at the initial stages of education at primary schools in which some education regarding social manners and habits should
also be given. "The homely example of Mandal Commission
derives home the point that the reservation have to be
made at the initial stages of education by having public
schools and other similar institutions to reserve seats at
lower levels for the "Lallus" who should be given free
education to nullify the 'obvious' vast differences in social
cultural and environmental factors. There after he/she
should be on his/her own" (India Today April 5, 1985).

The policy, however chooses to miss this aspect
by a mile and picks up Lalu when he is almost an adult and
thereafter pushes him up ward when he is a total misfit
causing not only heart burn in others but a loss to the
nation through jobs not well done.

Observation also emphasizes the fact that the
litigation in the area of reservation in university
admission and government services is more intense and
causes more social tensions and political conflits. It had
been the assumption of many that certain castes were by
definition 'backward' and thus, the recipients of official
benefits. This gave rise to universal clamour for being
designated as backward. Many governments, particularly in
south India, with a history of caste quotas, has extended
and expanded their schemes of preferences distributing jobs
and education to multitudes of castes. This generosity was
conferred by the government, partly to pacify the organized demands of the castes and communities and partly to strengthen political supporters for themselves. A commission appointed in 1953 (Backward Glass Commission) continues to defend the use of caste as the sole criterion of backwardness. The supreme Court intervened in 1963 and rejected 'Caste' as the sole determinant of backwardness. Instead of interpreting the protective clause by traditional values and norms the court addressed itself through the principle of secularism, egalitarianism and non-discrimination enshrined in the constitution. It was guided more by the current jurisprudential thinking on the notions of equality, rather than by the constitution of Manu. But despite the judicial resistance to the use of caste and communal units for identifying backwardness, such use is still persisting in the state practice on compensatory discrimination.

Regarding the reservation policy of Govt. Singh (1982) expressed his views in the following words: "In India today it is very common to see street violence, social unrest and public debate on the issue of 'reservations! Both the beneficiaries and non beneficiaries are unhappy over the policies of reservations. Beneficiaries complain that the benefits of job reservation are enjoyed only by the creamy elite among the backward classes leaving the large masses in extreme deprivation and neglect. The nonbeneficiaries complain that it is unfairway of distributing benefits to
the preferred groups at the cost of innocent individuals who are more meritorious than selected."

The recent trouble in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are the testimonies to the gravity of the situation caused by the reservation policies. Even more recent trouble in the peaceful states like Madhya Pradesh and Gujrat calls for our attention to the impact of reservation policy in the society in general.

But with the caste passions unleashed on the question of the "New" reservations the government did not know how to escape without betraying the commitments made to the backward classes on election eve. The mood was conciliatory, as evidenced by Home minister's offer to get the agitators and audience with the Prime Minister who had made a surprising anti reservation statement at Hyderabad.

If the tactics worked, it was yet to show results. In cities as distant as Jamnagar from Jaipur, Gwalior from Rajkot, the approach was strikingly similar as high caste students took to the streets. Hail the Government which has made another 10% castes backward in 37 years of independence, echoed thousand of handbills in Bhopal (Report in India Today 5th May, 1985). Also common to the states was the perfidy of the government using the
new reservation as an election gimmick ignoring the forces of social discord that such bad tuning could unleash.

In Gujrat the Rana Commission on backward classes submitted its report over 18 months ago. The government did not place the report in the Assembly. Now, with the elections approaching, it announced acceptance of the report with a disastrous rider. The commission has suggested economic as the key criterion for establishing backwardness, but one of the Ministers threw it out summarily in favour of caste.

The political decision was election oriented and it brought short term gains. As one of the state leaders of the opposite party said "The government announced the increase in the reservations to win over the backward class votes. Now with this stir on, they will go back on their decision. But they have been able to capture the votes. Yet, whatever be the political logic it was certainly not warranted by public interest. Here the view of the majority of the respondents seem to be very similar, as they hold the view that the privileges which are given to the untouchables are politically oriented.

In 1981, the state saw a bloody antireservation stir that left 40 dead and whole lot of property burnt in the course of its 100 furious days. More than that, it
left the social fabric in the state totally asunder.
In such a situation any further effort to make political
capital by working caste feelings was self defeating.
A human right activist and lawyer pointed to this danger.
"The situation is very explosive. If not dealt with sensitively,
the agitation will escalate into caste war with frightening
consequences." Political leaders gambled and made new
initial gains but final result left a castiest streak
behind.

The reaction came rather late. But it hit the
state with telling effect. On February 18 warning came from
the L.D. Engineering College in Ahmedabad, the cradle of
all students strike in the state. Students demonstrated and
the state government panicked, closing down all institutions,
soon in a move reminiscent of the massive Navnirman
movement that cost former Chief Minister his job, the high
caste students came together under the banner of Gujrat
Nav Rachana Samiti. Officials in Gandhinagar vouch for
the fact that the new leadership has already been infiltrated
if not usurped by some of the fierymen who led the 100
day agitation in 1981.

In Bhopal the centre of action is the Maulana
Azad College of technology on the outskirts of the town.
This is the premier Engineering College where the Madhya
Pradesh Elite sends its children and even more important, is the only institution with a history of an anti reservation movement of this sort. In August 1984, final year students had initiated a movement against the state government's decision to give women applicants preference in admission at the institution. Since most engineering colleges elsewhere in the state do not have hostels for women "we said if there are no hostels, build them. But do not give away seats in the states most coveted engineering college to undeserving girls while men wait" (India Today 1985). And we won says he. On this occasion the issues are much more wider. As numerical data shows the Madhya Pradesh agitators have a case much more stronger than that of their Gujrati counterparts who are agitating against the total reservation of 49 percent.

Since the state has a large tribal population which has already been given a 23 percent reservation. The new reservation announced for the backward classes, has pushed the tally to a ridiculous 78 percent. For example, of the 1,725 seats in the states, 1358 now come under reserved quota, of the 720 Medical College seats 497 fall in this category. Similarly the ratio for agriculture, Veterinary, Polytechnic and Ayurvedic Medical Colleges, respectively is 336 out 425, 78/out 100, 2831 out of 3730 and 150 out of 317 (Ahmedabad Bureau report). Students complained
"At this rate they should have similar reservation for the national cricket team. How will it look, if it were to have mandatory two men each from scheduled castes, tribes and backward classes and ex-serviceman, a woman and disabled person. Added a second year polytechnic student and a member of the action committee of the agitators" we do not grudge their privileges, we do not care whether the government gives them airconditioned houses or Impala cars. But why take away our seats. It is this logic of seats that students question, saying, "we will have to keep in mind the fact that the state has a very large number of communities which have always been backward because they were not given the opportunity to grow. We can not ignore them for ever.

At the same time the backward classes themselves were becoming alive to the new threat. In Indore Harijan organisations threatened to launch a counter stir, said a former state minister. "People of the upper classes should be able to make at least some sacrifice for the downtrodden." Dalit Panther general secretary went a step further arguing that only a Harijan, tribal or backward Chief Minister could, affectively implement the new reservation policy.

But the key question is the Ramji Mahajan report. The commissioner concluded that 49.3 percent of the states
population consists of backwards. This is an addition to 20% tribals and 13% scheduled castes. By what stretch of imagination can the goldsmiths be categorised as backwards? Asks Bhopal agitation leader. In fact when the state government referred the report to a secretaries committee they rejected it. Interestingly, the state government has not yet placed the report in the assembly. The two documents continue to carry the secret tag.

Politically the Mandal Commission report has acquired a curious status. While continuing to back the report at the time of elections, the leaders of the opposition parties privately express their reservations about it. But they were collectively responsible for setting up the commission and also approving concessions similar to its recommendations by the Karpoori Thakur Government in Bihar.

The Antireservation feeling has already been picked up by the existing leadership. Rather cryptic statement of Prime Minister at Hyderabad that reservation had been provided for a certain purpose which they have failed to serve and the whole question requires a new look.

The younger generation feels that they are for an eventual abolition of reservations over a reasonable period of time. In any case why should the son of one of the
scheduled caste leader, one of the richest Harijans, be
given the benefits of reservation. The reply comes from
the Ex-minister himself. Says he, "I will not seek
reservation for my son the day he becomes a touchable."
He elaborates, arguing that even he is not touchable.
"Will a Brahmin call me to his house for a meal? May be
ministers would have done so. But aristocracy does not
define social values, the lower middle class does."

Most Harijan and backward class leaders also
argued that caste has to be the basis of identifying
backwardness. In their opinion reservation is not only
means of economic uplift but it is an instrument of
social change e.g. a shoemaker may make thrice of the amount
of a clerk does. Yet does he have prestige? But if a
cobblers son becomes a sub inspector Brahmin constable will
salute him. Imagine what kind of social revolution it is
when a sweepers son becomes a district Magistrate? If the
government should curtail reservations now, it will results
into a caste war. And one should know that reservation in
evitably arouse a caste passion and yet, as current happenings
show, there is no escape from facing the issue square on.
Both social scientists and responsible politicians agree
that there is need for reservations to continue and perhaps
even for a slight increase to include genuine backward classes.
This, however, needs to be done on the basis of a sound scientific study and not merely on the whims of old politicians made in charge of the politically motivated panel. Even a strong supporter of reservations, point out that the system is often irrational and requires a deeper, more scientific look.

A new government, however, has indicated a different approach implicit in Prime Minister’s statement at Hyderabad. It will make a difference, if he could translate that thought into action by setting up a new commission to draft a plan for the coming decades. The question can not be evaded for long now. Status quoism will only add fire to the higher castes campaign and to the backward class insecurities. And a combination of the two can hardly promise good news in years to come.

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