

# **Reservations for EWS:**

## **Myth called Creation of Job and Educational Opportunities**

In the dying moments of winter session of the Parliament, the Narendra Modi government moved 124th constitutional amendment to reserve 10 per cent seats in higher education and government employment to all who are in the 'unreserved' category, meaning the upper castes, Muslims and Christians.

The speed with which the amendment was rushed through Lok Sabha on January 8, cleared by Rajya Sabha on January 9, given assent by the President on January 12 and notified in the gazette on January 14 matched the spate of petitions opposing it came up before the Supreme Court and some High Courts. Within hours of the Parliament passing the bill, the first appeal was filed before the Supreme Court by a so-called NGO – 'Youth for Equality'. Cutting across all the parties in the Parliament, except three in Lok Sabha and seven in Rajya Sabha, all the MPs voted for the bill.

The criteria for recognising economic backwardness as notified by the government are: household income less than Rs.8 lakh; owning agricultural land below 5 hectares; homes smaller than 1000 sq. feet; residential plots below 109 sq. yards in municipal areas and 209 sq. yards in non-notified municipal areas. By these criteria 96 per cent of Indian population comes under reservation.

The loss of upper caste votes in the recent assembly elections in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh prompted the BJP to resort this move to regain its lost mainstay and sent an election time signal to upper caste Hindus, rather than attempting to create equal educational and employment opportunities to all Indians. The BJP has tried to woo the upper castes as well as dominant peasant castes in various regions like Patels in Gujarat, Marathas in Maharashtra and Kapus in AP, who are agitating for reservations for their community. The BJP threw a challenge in the form of reservations to EWS to its opponents. The ruling class parties in the opposition have knuckled and supported the amendment except calling it as election time manoeuvre.

On most of the social issues one cannot answer in simple terms – yes or no, black or white. They should be viewed as part of the whole system. The reservations provided for SC and ST by the Indian Constitution are based on the perception that these communities are condemned to poverty through discriminative and oppressive caste system for hundreds of years and they need special assistance for some time until they catch up with the economically and socially dominant castes and sections. Later, OBC reservations came with the implementation of Mandal commission though it was earlier implemented by some state governments.

Reservations in jobs were never implemented in the true spirit. Only during the last two decades some progress has been made. Even after seven decades of adopting the Constitution, the avowed pledge of universal literacy has not achieved. A little less than half of the population is illiterate, not to talk of the quality education imparting skill to our children that provides them with employment. Overwhelming majority of SC and ST population and a major chunk of people belonging to unreserved category find themselves having no chance of advancement.

This situation – result of failure of the successive governments at the centre and in the states – caused resentment and frustration on both sides, reserved and unreserved categories. While the reserved categories feel that they were denied of their rights, the unreserved category feel the 'others' are taking away their opportunities. This gave rise to various demands like sub-categorisation of reservations, inclusion in the

lists of SC, ST and OBC, reservations for economically backward sections in upper castes and so on.

The ruling class parties utilized this situation to whip up sentiments and perpetuate caste division in the society in order to maintain status quo in the existing social and political system, that is, semi-feudal and semi-colonial system. Gaining political mileage and votes is only a fall out of this wretched game played by them. The UPA government in 2014 notified Jats as OBC and gave 5 per cent quota to the community, though it was struck down by the Supreme Court. The BJP gave reservations to Gujjars in Rajasthan and Gujarat. After the assembly elections in Maharashtra, the BJP government provided reservations for Marathas. After the enactment of EWS reservations by the Centre, the Chief Minister of AP announced that his government will provide half of the EWS reservation of 10 per cent to the Muslims. The game goes on.

Reservations in education are related to only the higher educational institutions run by the government. The private institutions have to apply the reservations, but students from reserved categories have to pay several times more than what their counterparts in government colleges paid. As the policy of privatization of higher education being pursued at break neck speed, students from the socially as well as economically deprived sections are left in the lurch. The intermediate and elementary education has already pushed into oblivion.

On the other, reservations in jobs are restricted to only government sector. The organized sector employs little less than 10 per cent of the work force. The organized sector consists of the central, state and public sector enterprises along with the private sector. Thus the reservations apply to only 5 per cent employment, which is declining over the years. During the last four years, employment in the public sector enterprises has come down by whopping 13 per cent, from 16.9 lakh in 2014 to 14.7 lakh in 2018. The railway minister announced that railways will fill the existing 2 lakh vacancies over the next three years. The other side of the coin is, if and at all the vacancies were filled, by that time another 2 lakh vacancies arise as around 60,000 railway men will be retiring from the service every year. Narendra Modi claimed that his government would create one crore jobs every year. According to Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), almost 1.1 crore Indians lost their jobs in 2018 alone. An NSSO study, which the Modi government refuses to release, showed that unemployment rate in India recorded highest in 45 years and the employment destroyed in agriculture and manufacture due to demonetisation had not revived even after three years.

The EWS reservation is a master stroke played by the ruling classes. The criteria for the EWS reservations were decided in such a manner that 96 per cent of the people belonging to the unreserved category are made eligible for EWS quota. For all practical purposes, this turns EWS quota on par with open category as the marks scored in the test would be the deciding factor for selection. This is making mockery of the very concept of reservations- only to dupe the youth.

Seven decades after the independence, reservations for jobs and education in the government sector has not improved the educational and economic condition of SCs and STs to the extent it had to and as expected. Same is the case with OBCs. When the successive governments are shirking from the responsibility of providing jobs and education – that too under the din of enacting Right to Education and Right to Employment laws – there is no hope for the youth belonging to all sections and castes to get educated and employed in a decent manner. The youth should see through this smoke screen and understand the treacherous game of pitting one section of them against other for notional opportunities that did not exist being played by the ruling classes and their political parties.

The experience of seven decades has categorically showed that the present social system is not able to provide decent living conditions for the people. The feudal

**relations prevailing in the rural areas act as a fetter for the development of agriculture and rural population. The wealth created by the labouring people in all sectors of economy is being drained by the imperialist sharks and gobbled up by a handful of Indian big bourgeois families, leaving a very small fraction to the people of India. This is the real cause of poverty in India and consequent backwardness of various communities and castes. Unless and until the feudal relations are broken by distributing land to the tiller and overthrowing the imperialist domination on Indian economy, the country and the people will not witness the progress in their lives.**

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