

Caste in 'Class'

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The unceremonious exit of Dr Venugopal from the directorship of AIIMS and the consequent brouhaha has inadvertently pushed under the carpet a few relevant issues concerning the discrimination faced by a section of the students, which needed urgent attention.

A few days back the 'Medicos Forum for Equal Opportunities', a forum of doctors supporting reservation, had submitted a memorandum to the President of India apprising him of "the open discrimination against the reserved category students and doctors being resorted to by certain members of the faculty and the administrative authorities in different medical colleges of Delhi including the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences" (*The Hindu*, 28 June 2006). It was also revealed by a representative of the forum that 'The Director of the Institute P Venugopal and a section of the faculty took active part in the anti-reservation agitation in the name of maintaining the autonomy of AIIMS.'

But matters did not end there. An explosive writeup in a leading daily titled 'Ghettos in Medical Hostel' (*The Telegraph*, 5th July 2006) reported Parts of All India Institute of Medical Sciences hostels are turning into SC/ST ghettos. Reserved category students said they were being "hunted out of the remaining rooms" by upper-caste students and driven to two floors of the hostels. According to the report, 'Some SC/ST students alleged that to keep them from revealing the discrimination, they were often "failed in examinations", which acted as a threat.' Interestingly a sub-dean of the Institute, who happens to belong to the scheduled category corroborated this.

It is a strange coincidence that when AIIMS was making news for altogether wrong reasons, the goings on in another premier institution namely the Delhi University, came under public scanner. It had its genesis in a questionnaire, which was sent to SC/ST teachers of Delhi University by the administration itself in mid-March, to know from them the biases/ problems faced by them at the workplace. While the four hundred plus SC/ST teachers welcomed the move, a section of the teachers belonging to the BJP-led teachers' front opposed it calling it 'unconstitutional' and expressed the prognosis that it would 'lead to social tension.'

A question naturally arises who among the teaching fraternity was speaking truth. The selfsame section had resisted all attempts by the Delhi University to fill the backlog of vacancies reserved for the SC and STs. It was a shocking piece of news for the earlier government when it learned that there were only 100 teachers from the scheduled caste category till 2001. Actually the number should have been 1,400. The then government had then decided to organise special drive for filling the backlog. This decision had been duly ratified by the parliament.

These random samples of news from two premier institutions go to show the gravity of the situation as it exists today vis-a-vis caste discrimination within educational institutions at various levels. A close look at the Sixth Report of the National

Commission for SCs and STs, 1999-2000 provides details of the representation of dalits in various central universities. This goes to confirm the discrimination at the level of employe-ment entrenched in the system.

The details provided may look a bit dated but one can vouch that barring exceptions, there will not be any difference in the overall picture. The situation at IITs, another 'flagship' institutions which supposedly make India proud is no better. In fact according to a writeup 'out of 450 faculty members in IIT, Chennai there were three belonging to SC/ST communities as they had also been selected in the general category on the basis of merit' (Vivek Kumar, *Alternative Economic Survey*, 2002-2003, Page 156)

A close look at the recent changes in economy and polity in the country makes it clear that the situation getting worse for the members of the scheduled category. Unless urgent steps are not taken to ameliorate the situation there is going to be further shrinkage of avenues of education as well as employment within educational institutions. First and foremost, the economic reforms of the 1990s and the consequent process of privatisation and commercialisation of education and the abandonment of affirmative action in these sectors, has further marginalised these sections. Secondly, the technological changes signified by the 'information technology' revolution has given birth to a new 'digital divide' wherein the dalits and tribals are finding themselves at the receiving end.

The discussion about the functioning of the 'hidden apartheid' of caste at various levels would be incomplete unless one discerns the con-tent of courses and finds for oneself how the system of caste and Varna is glorified in very many ways and thus getting a new lease of life. ❧❧

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Table Depicting the Representation of Dalits in Various Central Universities

Type of Service	Universities						
	Actual number of dalit appointees / Total number of posts						
	BHU	AMU	JNU	DU	JMI	VISHWA BHARATI	HYDERABAD C.U.
1. Professor	1/360	0/233	2/183	3/332	0/80	1/148	1/72
2. Reader	1/396	0/385	3/100	2/197	1/128	1/70	2/87
3. Lecturer/Asst.Prof	1/329	0/521	11/70	9/140	1/216	16/188	13/44