

Balancing Act

Being part of quota-culture is a nice way for non-performing politicians to remain in the rat race of power game. These days no political party, not even the conservative Bharatiya Janata Party, openly opposes reservation quota—or for that matter sub-quota—knowing fully well that quota is essentially about politics, not economics. After more than six decades of parliamentary ‘maturity’ this is what caste-ridden Indian democracy looks like! And law in this biggest showpiece of democracy with a voluminous written constitution, always takes its ‘own course’, hopefully, to satisfy the litigants. With Andhra Pradesh High Court quashing the 4.5 percent sub-quota to minorities carved out of 27 percent Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservation, the Congress Party that initiated the move on the eve of Uttar Pradesh (UP) assembly elections to woo minority voters, particularly muslim voters who can influence the outcome of each and every poll in a major way, ‘Babri’ or ‘no Babri’, may heave a sigh of relief because their balancing act seems to be working. They have no option but to challenge the Andhra High Court verdict in the apex court while keeping the minority community in good humour that they are really serious about sub-quota. But this quota reflects a deeply fractured democracy.

In all fairness the Congress Party’s gambit did not click in UP. Nor will it work anywhere in the country in the coming days. Muslim voters didn’t vote for the Congress despite the sub-quota carrot. It is unlikely for them to return to the Congress fold so long as they have some kind of secular or semi-secular option as they presently find it in Mulayam Singh’s Samajwadi Party in the crucial state of UP. The sub-quota syndrome was activated purely on religious grounds and in the process the Congress Party succeeded in isolating itself further from both ‘forward caste’ and ‘backward caste’ foot soldiers.

OBC stalwarts, otherwise the symbol of regressive force and reverse casteism, didn’t react to the Andhra High Court judgement for obvious reasons. After all slicing of their cake is not going to take place anytime soon. Then the forward-backward divide gets blurred from state to state as a forward caste in one state becomes backward in another. With 3000 OBCs competing to get their place under the sun it is next to impossible for the majority to have justice though social justice remains the byword for all. When they will decide on economic backwardness, not caste backwardness as the guiding principle to do justice to the under-privileged is anybody’s guess.

As for the communist left, they at no point of time took up the issue of caste seriously, albeit their approach to class was too clever by half even at the initial stage. They thought industrialisation would automatically demolish caste paving the way for smooth class revolution of their kind.

No, it didn’t happen in the yester years. Nor will it happen in the foreseeable future. Even highly organised workers with a long history of struggles and sacrifices are not free from caste prejudices and communal viruses. As for religious identity the less said the better. Toilers with

diverse religious affiliations don't hesitate to resort to communal riots under slight provocation, forgetting class identity even in the so-called forward states.

As long as economic basis of communalism and casteism remains intact 'quota' will fail to bury simmering sub-altern anger. The hard fact is that they cannot create more jobs but it is somewhat easy to keep the socially and economically disadvantaged divided by dangling the quota card from time to time.

Also, rapid urbanisation has failed to break the caste-barrier as urbanisation goes simultaneously with ghettoisation. A lucky few who have improved their lot through reservation don't really bother about their moral responsibility. Not that Ram Vilas Paswan is the sole phenomenon of dalit-rise. Earlier there was Jagjivan Ram. Even after so many years of reservation one Ram and two Paswans remain exception to the rule—dalits are dalit still. It is the mechanism of assimilation of a small elite club within a bigger elite club! And the tradition continues as the quota serves the purpose nicely.

What is written in the constitution is one thing. And what is being practised in the field is quite another. Religion-based reservation is not permissible but it is religion that gets top consideration when they indulge in sub-quota culture.

Those who are too vocal about social justice are not in favour social revolution as they have many things to lose if the dalits really rise to the occasion by breaking the age-old social barriers otherwise institutionalised through religious and other scriptures.

The left movement cannot annihilate caste as it is no less caste-ridden in terms of leadership hierarchy. And the far left doesn't see any reason to waste time on caste-question as they think tribal revolt against oppression and exploitation will bring in radical change in society in its entirety. If the persons in power can play the caste-based quota card endlessly it is because the champions of class revolution are themselves a bewildered lot as they are now questioning the very ideals they stand for.

While the economy buckles under a mountain of debt, inflation which nagged India for much of the past year, is unlikely to ease to tolerable limits in the ensuing financial year. As the growth-moderators are hopelessly pessimistic about the economy, the debate over job-quota makes little sense because there won't be created many jobs for distribution as crisis managers in New Delhi are too determined to implement austerity measures. □□□