

## The Reservation Hurricane

**By: CSVR Murthy**

One common thing which binds Indian political leaders cutting across party lines is the issue of reservation to the deprived classes in premier educational institutions run by the Central government. At least for the sake of hypothesis, as in deriving a formula for a scientific corollary, for the moment we shall believe that the classes for which reservation is sought needs the privilege. On this premise, the hot issue of providing reservation to candidates belonging to OBC is reminiscing of the unrest that took place in 1990 as regards implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations. The pages of reservation books have invariably been filled with blood and flames; the result of lathi charges and self immolations that followed the dark episodes of anti-reservation struggle. History repeats itself and this time, again the government has a mighty role in this encore of the agitation by a wider section of the student faculty.

Notwithstanding so many factors amidst a troubled neighborhood with China offering a healthy competition in terms of growth, India is witnessing tremendous growth in her economic indices. At a time when India is catching up with developed nations and powerful signals are taking over the once gloomy nation, the idea of promulgating 27% reservation to OBCs has stirred the hornet's nest. Moreso, the obstinacy of the government to get it implemented in the current academic session has triggered lot of protests not only from the students of institutions managed by Central government such as Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), Indian Institute of Management (IIMs), All Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) etc, but also parents of the students seemed to take an active participation in what may be termed a 'movement'. The medical fraternity went to the extent of refraining from active services in hospitals and cases of students expressing their anguish in different forms hit the headlines of newspapers.

Amazingly a section of the OBC candidates for whom the case is being fought had opined that the move by the government to implement the reservation of 27% when the total would become 49.5%, would widen the gap between the students with respect to caste, which would be detrimental to the interest of the nation. Though there are two sections; one advocating the reservation and one against the reservation, the latter seem to be in majority. The students across the nation feel that this would eat into the prospects of meritorious candidates and the government is hell bent to implement the recommendations with a myopic view of vote bank arithmetic. The announcement couldn't have come at a more inopportune moment within matter of days when the Indian Prime Minister known for his erudition in Economics spoke about India's prowess in the Harvard University and it would be ensured that there is no compromise on quality of Education.

In the context of reservation, the state of Tamilnadu provides the maximum reservation of 69%. With reference to Dravida Kazhagam (DK), an organization in Tamilnadu, which has been championing for the cause of social justice for the backward communities, its leader Veeramani was right in justifying reservations to aid manual workers and other workers, who toiled physical labor. The children of these lower strata could not get the opportunity to sit as equals with students of upper castes – owing to poor educational and financial background in which they

were brought up. If this is one valid reason, other factors doesn't cut much ice on the subject. Reservations are supposed to set the ball rolling initially and once it starts; there is no need for a second torque. If this continues incessantly for generations, the balance would be lost and a time may arise, when the so called privileged classes become under privileged in due course and thus another cycle starts.

There is a feeling among the legal intelligentsia that necessary constitutional amendment to facilitate the admission to OBCs in Central Government and Private educational institutions as well- contradicts the basic structure of the constitution, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste for admission to educational institutions. Notwithstanding jurisprudence, the proliferation of caste based politics in the area of education and employment has created a general indignant youth among present generation of youngsters.

The announcement by the government to implement the reservation gradually in phases may be perceived to quell the fears of the protesters for the moment. Stern action and notices to terminate the services of Doctors has had only lukewarm response amongst the agitators. Mounting reports of students collapsing in hunger strike, burning of effigies and termination notices reflected the mood of the students concerned. The apprehensions by the concerned cannot be ignored and the decision to go ahead with the implementation at any cost sans convincing the future stars of India may only lead to an impasse.

Lord Meghnad Desai, renowned Economist of UK had expressed his displeasure towards reservations in the Indian system of Governance. Corporate Czar and Wipro Chief Azim Premji had expressed that his selection of people would only be on merit. On issue of reservations, Chief of Asia Development Bank (ADB), Ifzal Ali had given his opinion that the purpose would fail its purpose of broad basing employment, since the institution delivers only a handful of people.

P.C.Bhargava, Vice-President of National Knowledge Commission, India who is also a biotechnologist and interestingly who voted in support of the quota has been very practical in saying that it has to be implemented in phases and in a period of 10 to 15 years it has to be phased out too. Mr. Bhargava and Mr. Narayana Murthy, the ex-Chief of Infosys; the company, which was recently listed in the New York stock exchange have struck similar chords in expressing that instead –of taking the extreme step of reservations to the levels of premier institutes, focus on excellent basic primary and secondary education are to be carried out in tune with good Central schools. The IT mogul has thrown excellent light by suggesting a study as to how far the reservation has really helped the backward classes in the last 55 years.

If the reservations don't serve the purpose of nation building by the concerned students benefited by reservation, it indirectly results in a double whammy; the nation loses talent and the meritorious students who otherwise would have gained the chance to enter these prestigious precincts also stand to lose. Reservations on Economic criteria don't seem to come to the fore, the issue which needs an impartial debate inasmuch as days of caste and creed have waned and we are in an era of globalization governed by economic compulsions.

The idea of increasing the seats has also met with a partial refusal in that the Director of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad had expressed his inability to increase the number of seats as it's already full. Also, increasing the seats would automatically accompany the theory that correspondingly, the reserved seats would also increase in terms of percentage of total number of seats. Many questions remain unanswered and the Pandora's Box of reservation needs an early closure to mollify the apprehensions of meritorious students – in such a way that a decision is taken at the larger interest of the nation and budding youth power.