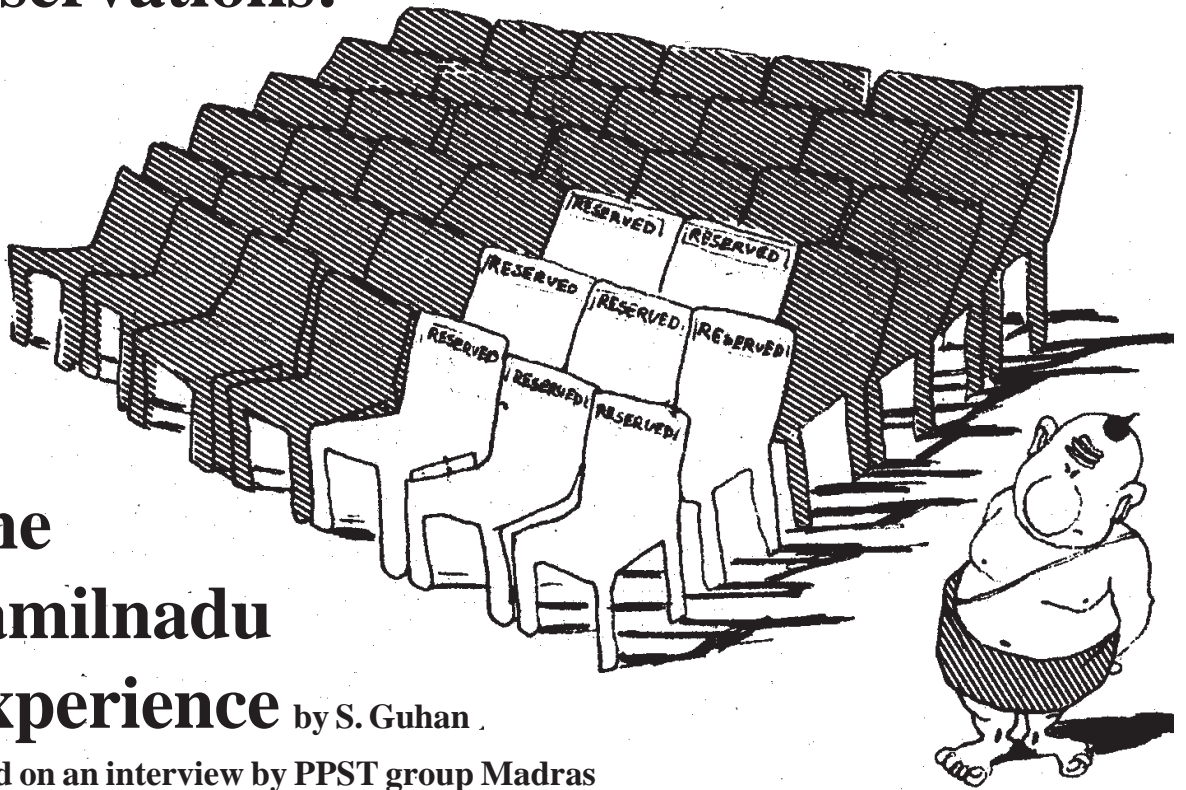


Reservations:

The Tamilnadu Experience

by S. Guhan

based on an interview by PPST group Madras



By way of background, can you, to begin with, give us an idea of the caste configuration in Tamilnadu?

Historically, the caste configuration in Tamilnadu has not had a close correspondence to the traditional Hindu *varna* system. There is a theory that originally there was no caste at all in Dravidian society and that it was an imposition by the Aryans. There was a ritualistic Brahmin caste, as elsewhere in India, but beyond that there were no clear distinctions such as Kshatriyas and Vaisyas and the entire population other than Brahmins was classified as 'Shudras', considered an abusive description that came to be rightly resented by those so characterised.

Let us see the caste configuration as it is today. Fortunately we have a 100 percent caste census which was undertaken in Tamilnadu in 1984 by the Second Backward Classes Commission under the Chairmanship of Mr. J. A. Ambashankar. According to this census, about 19.5 percent of the population consists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST). We have about 24 percent included in what has come to be known as the 'Most Backward Classes'. Then you have about 43.5 percent of the population consisting of Backward Classes. The Forward communities, consisting of both non-Hindus and Hindus, constitutes only about 12.5 percent; of them, about 4 percent are non-Hindus and about 8.5

percent are Forward community Hindus.

Among the Forward communities within Hindus, the Brahmins are the most populous, accounting for about 10 lakhs, or two to three percent of the population. Other Forward communities belong to the traditional upper peasantry of Vellalars, Pillaimars and Mudaliars. We also have similar Telugu speaking castes, the Naidus and Reddiars. The important Tamil speaking trading caste in the Forward group are Chettiars, while Balija Naidus and Komutti and Beri Chettis are similar Kannada and Telugu speaking castes. We also have Malayalam speaking Forward Castes in Nairs and Menons. Among the Backward and

most Backward Classes, the middle and the small peasantry constitute the bulk. The most populous amongst them are the Vanniars who have been Classified among the Most Backward Classes. They are about 65 lakhs in number. Among the peasantry, other populous communities are Kongu Vellalars, Agamudaiyars, Yadavars, Kallars and Maravars. The traditional artisanal castes are Viswakarmas (carpenters, goldsmiths and blacksmiths) and the important services castes are Kullalars (potters), Vannars (Washermen) and Maruthuvars (Barbers). In addition the Backward (including Most Backward) Classes include weavers, fishermen, and trading castes such as Nadars. Urdu and Tamil speaking Muslims (Labbais) and Christian converts from the SC, the fishing community, and Nadars have also been included among Backward Classes.

The sum up, the Forward non-Hindus and Hindus constitute only about 12.5 percent of the population. Apart from the Brahmins, they include castes which in the past were known as high Class Vellalars. They also include non-Hindu communities. 43.5 percent of the total population has been classified as Backward Classes and 24.5 percent as Most Backward Classes. The SC/ST population is a little less than 20 percent. At the time of the old Madras Presidency, there were also other important non-Brahmin castes such as the Kapus and Kammas of Andhra and Malayalam speaking people from Malabar.

Tamilnadu has had a long history going back to the 1920s, of reservations. Can you give us an idea of the historical development of reservations?

Let me begin by drawing attention to the striking dominance of the Brahmins in the early part of this century. It is not as if Brahmins were among major landholders, although it has been

estimated that about a third of Brahmin families received some income from land. However, and perhaps because they were not attached to land, they took to education very early, especially English education, when the British began establishing colleges and universities around the middle of the nineteenth century. The orientation of the Brahmins to scriptural learning must have certainly given them an advantage in this respect. In 1901, the literacy rate among Brahmins — who were only three percent of the population — was 73.6 percent, and English literacy was 17.9 percent compared to only 6.9 percent and 0.2 percent for Vellalars (upper-caste non-Brahmins). From 1870-1918, 67 percent of the graduates of Madras University were Brahmins; of Bachelor of Law degree holders, they were 73.6 percent of the teaching degrees. Since medicine was considered to be polluting, their number in this field was less than that of non-Brahmins. But they caught up. In 1951, but for reservations, 65 percent of medical admissions would have gone to Brahmins.

The near-monopoly of Brahmins in education led to their cornering of government jobs. In 1912-17, the Brahmins accounted for 55 percent of deputy collectorships, 83 percent of subjudges, 73 percent of district munsifs, and 65 percent of higher ministerial posts in the revenue and judicial departments. In fact, the first executive order to limit Brahmins representation in the revenue department was issued as far back as 1854, when it was found that the entire revenue establishment in Nellore district was controlled by 49 Brahmins, all from the same family.

This was the background in which the Justice Party was founded in 1916. Its leadership came not only from Tamil Vellalars, but also from Telugu-speaking

people in Tamilnadu like Sir Tyagaraja Chetti, from some of the leading people in Andhra like Sir K.V. Reddi Naidu, and the Raja of Panagal, and Dr. T.M. Nair, a renowned Malayali doctor. The important point to note here is that Tamilnadu already had such persons in the non-Brahmin elite. It was a thin elite but powerful enough to be able to successfully challenge Brahmin supremacy.

There was also certainly an element of historical conjuncture which contributed to the early success of the Justice Party, it will not be possible for me to do full justice in this interview to the fascinating chapter of Tamil social and political history of the first two decades of this century. Interested readers will find a very good account in Eugene Irschick's book *Politics and Social Conflicts in South India*. Because of the non-cooperation movement, the Congress did not contest the 1920 elections, enabling the Justice Party to a have walk over. The British undeniably played a role in encouraging the non-Brahmin movement. They identified the Brahmin community with nationalism, especially the Home Rule Movement promoted by Mrs Annie Besant, and even with terrorism at the time of the Rowlatt Act. In turn, the non-Brahmin movement looked to the British for securing fair representation for their community in the context of Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. While all this is true, there was a substantive aspiration for social justice in the non-Brahmin community wanting to have a share commensurate with its population in the legislature and in educational and employment opportunities.

The history of educational concessions and reservations in posts and of other measures for preferential treatment in Tamilnadu extends as far back as 1884. This was when the grant-in-aid code included special educational

concessions for the Backward Castes. The lists of such castes were prepared from time to time on the basis of petitions and recommendations thereon from Collectors and the Director of Public Instruction. In 1957, a list of Most Backward Classes was prepared in order to extend educational concessions to them on a par with those extended to SC and ST.

Coming to job reservations, I have already mentioned the executive instructions to limit Brahmin representation that were issued by the Revenue Department in 1854. In actual practice there was not, however, much progress in reducing Brahmin dominance. Accordingly, these instructions had to be reiterated from time to time. In what came to be known as the First and Second Communal GOs (Government Orders), the Justice Party government extended these executive instructions to other departments in 1921 and to promotion by selection in 1922. However, all this was only in the form of executive instructions to provide larger opportunities to the non-Brahmin communities. They were not regulatory.

The first formal reservation orders was passed in 1927. This provided specific quotas to five groups. Non-Brahmins, who were estimated to be 72 percent in the population, were given a quota of 41.67 percent. Brahmin, three percent in the population, were given a quota of 16.67 percent. Anglo-Indians and Christians, four percent in the population, were given a quota of 16.67 percent. Mohammedans, seven percent in the population, were also given a quota of 16.67 percent. Depressed Classes, who were 14 percent in population, were given a quota of only 8.33 percent.

In 1934, the Madras Provincial Backward Classes League was founded. The members of the League, leaders among the SCs (such as Mr M.C.

Ra-jah) and Muslim groups, all began accusing the Forward non-Brahmin communities of cornering a large share in public employment. As a result of this pressure, the quotas were revised in 1947. The new reservation for non-Brahmins Hindus was 42.86 percent. A separate category of 'Backward Hindus' was introduced with a quota of 14.29 percent. The quota for Harijans, as they were then termed, was substantially increased to 14.29 per-cent. The quota for Anglo-Indians/ Christians and



Mohammedans was reduced to 7.14 percent. The important point to note is that the quota for Brahmins has been four to five times their population share and that for Forward non-Brahmins was more than twice their population share.

In 1951, after the Constitution was passed, the 'Communal GOs' of 1947 were struck down by the Madras High Court and, thereafter, by the Supreme Court in two important decisions, namely Champakam Durairajan versus the State of Madras in the case of educational institutions, and in Venkataramana versus the State of Madras in public services. These

decisions resulted in agitations in Madras, notably the one led by Periyar E. V. Ramaswami Naicker. K. Kamaraj was the leader of the Congress Party in the Madras state, although he was not yet the Chief Minister, and he played a major role in conveying the deep concern of the people of Tamilnadu to Nehru. This was the background to the introduction of Article 15(4) in the Constitution which permitted special measures for the benefit of Socially and Educationally Backward Classes in admission to educational institutions. Nehru admitted in Parliament: "the House knows very well and there is no need to hush it up, the this particular matter in this particular shape arose because of certain happenings in Madras."

In keeping with the requirements of the Constitution it was not possible to allot specific quotas to different groups. Therefore, in 1951, the reservations for the purpose of both Articles 15(4) and 16(4) were broad-banded. The percentage was fixed at 15 for SC and ST, 25 for Backward Classes and 60 for open competition. Following the formation of the Andhra state in 1953, the percentage for SC and ST was increased by one percent to 16 and that for open competition was reduced by 1 percent to 59. Following the report of the First Back-ward Classes Commission under the Chairmanship of Mr A.N. Sattanathan, the percentages were again revised as 18 for SC/ST and 31 for Backward Classes and 51 for open competition. In 1980, the MGR administration significantly increased the percentage for Backward Classes from 31 to 50 and correspondingly reduced the percentage for open competition from 51 to 32. In 1989, the present DMK government introduced a new category of Most Backward Classes and denotified communities for whom they provided a separate reservation of 20

percent carving out this figure from the earlier 50 percent reservation for Backward Classes as a whole. Recently an extra one percent point has been given to SC/ST in accordance with the court decision that the Scheduled Tribes should have a separate percentage.

The net position today is that we have an overall reservation in Tamilnadu of 69 percent broken up as 19 percent for SC/ST, 30 percent for Backward Classes and 20 percent for Most Backward Classes with the balance of 31 percent being available for open competition in which, of course, all communities can participate.

How were the lists for Backward Classes and Most Backward Classes arrived at?

Basically the lists that were prepared for purposes of fee concessions, from time to time, have been adopted for the purposes of reservations under Articles 15(14) and 16(4). The First Backward Classes Commission streamlined and consolidated these lists, which were hitherto maintained by three departments, namely, the Department of Backward Classes, the Education Department and the Tamilnadu Public Service Commission. The consolidated list was published in 1972. Since then, 21 entries have been added up to 1980. About half of these were only clarifications while the balance were new entries. In 1985, the Second Backward Classes Commission recommended the inclusion of 29 communities. These were individually small and added upto a population of only about 4 lakhs. The list notified in 1957 in the report of educational concessions to Most Backward Classes was adopted without change when the separate reservations was provided to this category in 1989.

Altogether, we have today a list with 250 entries for Backward Classes, including the Most Backward Classes.

We should not be staggered by this figure because only 25 communities are significant in terms of population. Together these 25 communities account for some 261 lakhs or about 77 percent of the total population of 340 lakhs for the Backward and Most Backward Classes. The other 225 communities are individually quite small, each accounting for some 30,000 in number or about 6000 families. This illustrates that it is not correct to say that caste based reservation leads to fragmentation.

I would also point out that the additions made in the 1970s and 1980s have reflected, by and large genuine backwardness. This is borne out by the

Second Backward Classes Commission which went into the social, educational and economic condition of various castes in great detail. They recommended the exclusion of only seven communities — with a total population of only about 56,000 — from among those included after 1972. They also recommended 15 other communities (with a total population of about 34 lakhs) for exclusion but the government did not accept this recommendation. What is important to note is that the communities which were recommended for exclusion on the ground of relative progress were not, in the main, the new communities that were added after Independence. Rather, they were largely communities which, virtue of reservations over a long span, had registered fair progress in educational and employment opportunities. It must also be pointed out that the size of such communities. It must also be pointed out that the size of such communities, recommended for 'graduation' constituted only about seven percent of the total population. Thus the allegation that more and more ineligible communities get included in the list and the allegation that a large proportion of them are undeserving of special treatment are both largely baseless

bogeys. In addition to reservations, the Tamilnadu government has pursued various other preferential programmes for Backward Classes. A separate department was set up for this purpose in 1969 under the earlier government of Mr Karunanidhi, and a similar department for Most Backward Classes was set up in 1989 when the category was introduced. Substantial budgetary allotments are made for preferential programmes such as hostels, scholar-ships, stipends, notebooks, uniforms and so on. There is also a Backward Classes Corporation engaged in giving loans for income earning opportunities.

Now that these measures have been implemented for more than 60 years, what has been the impact on the quality of educational admissions and on efficiency in government?

Let me take up the question of admission to educational institutions first. Recently, there was an interesting article in *The Hindu* by Mr Era Chezhiyan, which gives the cut-off level in marks scored by the lowest performers in various courses. This article provides separate figures for open competition, as well as for reserved quotas for Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, and SC/ST. Taking the MBBS courses, for instance, we find that the cut-off level in 1990 under open competition was 95.22 percent. This was only 2.04 percent higher than the cut-off level under the Backward Classes quota which was 93.18 percent and it was only 5.6 per-cent higher than the cut-off level under the Most Backward Classes quota which came to 89.62 percent. In other words, the lowest performer in open competition was more 'meritorious' by only 2.04 percent compared to the lowest performer in the Backward Classes quota, and by no more than 5.6 percent compared to the lowest performer in the Most Backward Classes quota. If we

did not have reservations, the marks scored by the lowest performer in open competition would be closer still to those registered by the beneficiaries of reservations. This only shows that, given time and patience, 'merit' ceases to be the monopoly of the Forward communities and the so-called Backward Classes tend to catch up fast.

Another way to look at this is to consider the share which the Backward Classes are able to obtain in open competition, strictly on the basis of merit. In 1990, in engineering courses, we find that in open competition seats, 45.6 percent was won by Backward Classes, 4.9 percent by the Most Backward Classes and 0.4 percent by SCs and STs.

Some people have argued that if the Backward Classes are able to do so well on merit, why do they require reservations? This question arises from a superficial understanding of the problem. This will be evident by considering what will happen if reservations are confined to SC/ST and the balance of 81 percent is made available for open competition. In that event, the Backward and Most Backward Classes, with a population share of 68 percent, are likely to get only a 41 percent share in seats and posts while the Forward communities, with a population share of 12.5 percent will be able to corner a 40 percent share. Moreover, the Most Backward Classes will get marginalised; going by their current performance, they are likely to get only an eight percent share as against their population of 24 percent. The better performance of Backward Classes, over time does not, therefore, constitute a case for reducing the quantum of reservations. At best, it indicates that the time might have come to 'graduate' the most Forward among the Backward Classes from out of the reserved quota. I shall separately discuss this question of graduation

which has its own complexities.

Theoretically, it is quite impossible to measure the diverse and changing factors that contribute to efficiency. Those who argue that reservations have adversely affected efficiency either allege a decline in efficiency either allege a decline in efficiency over time in the same state, or alternatively they compare the efficiency of states with reservations with those without them. The latter comparison will show that states like Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka



which have a long history of compensatory discrimination are certainly not the worst administered in India. In fact, they are better administered than many states which have had a shorter history and/or a lower quantum of reservations such as UP and Bihar. Also, the argument about declining standards over time cannot be *prima facie* accepted because the tasks that face the government today are qualitatively and quantitatively different from the tasks 30 or 40 years ago. As regards Tamilnadu, I can say, based on my fairly close exposure to its administration for nearly 35 years, that it continues to be pretty efficient at all levels. In fact, I would go further and

argue that reservations have improved the morale of the services in terms of caste cohesion and social responsiveness. Thereby, both the internal and external functioning of the administration are upgraded. This to my mind is efficiency in the broadest sense.

Don't the Forward Castes have reason to feel aggrieved about the loss of opportunities? How have they adjusted themselves to reservations?

I would like to view the question somewhat differently. The issue is not whether psychologically the Forward communities feel aggrieved, but whether in actual fact and in equity they have legitimate cause for feeling discriminated against. My answer is in the negative. For instance, taking engineering college admissions in 1990, we find that Backward Classes, including Most Backward Classes, obtained a share of 65.6 percent which is somewhat less than their population share of 67.9 percent. On the other hand, Forward communities with a population share of 12.5 percent, have obtained a 15.3 percent share in admissions. No inequity is therefore involved on this score. Secondly, let us look at the ratio of selections to applications. We find that the Forward communities scored a ratio of 7.7 percent which is not very much lower than the 9.5 percent scored by the Backward Classes. On this score also, Forward Classes cannot complain of being discriminated against. The Most Backward Classes have registered a ratio of 17.6 percent and this is as it should be. Third, and most important, Forward communities in Tamilnadu, as elsewhere in India, have done extremely well in private sector employment and in high paid self employment opportunities in professions such as law, medicine, private engineering, construction, accountancy and so on. Incidentally, the major local industrial groups in Tamilnadu are in the hands of the Brahmin, Chettiar and Naidu

communities. Substantial numbers from Forward communities have been able to get good opportunities through migration to metropolitan centres in other states in India and to countries abroad. They have also done well in selections such as those for all-India services, the IITs, management institutes and so on. Altogether, therefore, the sense of grievance, if it is evaluated over a large canvas, does not have much legitimacy. In particular cases, of course, there could be an element of unfairness. That is an inevitable consequence when group injustice, which has persisted for a long time in the age long unequal and exploitative caste system, is redressed through group justice in the form of reservations.

What is your reaction to the criticism that reservations have mostly benefited only the elite of the Backward Classes and have not helped the most Backward among them?

We must recognise that any scheme of reservation is likely to benefit the elite, at least to start with, disproportionately vis-a-vis benefits to more deprived sections of the target group. This is neither unnatural nor is it disastrous, since elites fulfil a useful function in groups that have remained Backward for generations. This point was tellingly clarified by Dr. Ambedkar while answering certain questions put to him by the Kalelkar Commission. He said: "Our problem is not different status should disappear. If there are 10 barristers, 20 doctors, 30 engineers in a community, I regard that community as rich even though every one of them may not be educated. Take, for instance, Chamars - you look upon this community with hatred but if there are some lawyers, doctors, and educated persons among them, you cannot put your hands on them. You will not do that, although everyone of them is not so highly educated. You will say he is a Bhangi but suppose there are educated persons

among them, you will respect them."

Having said this, we can all agree that the scheme of reservation should be so structured that it reaches out not only to the upper groups among the Backward Classes but extends as far as possible to the most disadvantaged among them. We can seek to achieve this in three ways:

1) We should be careful about including new groups in the list of Backward Classes because typically the pressure for such inclusion comes from the upper end of the spectrum. As I have explained earlier, this has not happened to any major extent in Tamilnadu.

2) If reservations have lasted for a sufficiently long time, it is legitimate to ask whether certain communities originally classified among the Backward Classes should not be reclassified as Forward. This is what is meant by 'graduation.' The fact is that while the Second Backward Classes Commission in Tamilnadu felt that about seven percent of the population could be so graduated, the government did not agree to do so. This does indicate that graduation is politically difficult. However, we should not exaggerate the issue nor should we indulge in arguments for 'premature graduation.' Here I might draw a parallel between what happens in GATT in respect of international trade. The developing countries are given certain special preferences and very often there is pressure from advanced countries that his or that developing country should be graduated out. The developing countries, who can be compared in a manner of speaking with the Backward Classes, have always argued against premature graduation.

3) Third and most important method of improving the reach of reservations is to give a separate quota to the Most Backward Classes. This has now been done in Tamilnadu with the introduction of a special reservation of 20 percent

for them. As a result, in the last two years, Vanniyars, who are the largest group among the Most Backward Classes, have scored nearly three times as many posts and admissions compared to what they used to secure in the past. Here again, we have a parallel in international economic relations. Originally, official aid targets were fixed for developing countries as a whole but only during the last decade or so, have separate targets been adopted for the least developed countries.

To sum up, I would argue that the criticism that the benefits of reservations are cornered or creamed off by an elite group is vastly exaggerated. It is also misplaced because in these matters some amount of percolation is natural and inevitable. And finally, there are practical ways of dealing with this problem, through strictness in inclusion, progressive graduation, and separate reservations for Most Backward groups.

Have reservations perpetuated caste based divisiveness in Tamilnadu?

In Tamilnadu, as elsewhere in India, caste is tenacious and there is a lot of caste consciousness whether you take matrimonial advertisements or elections to college unions or *panchayats* or to the assembly or to parliament. Caste consciousness has certainly its bad sides but it is also not without some beneficial aspects. Because of caste fraternity, the advanced sections in many castes have undertaken efforts to uplift their caste as a whole. In Tamilnadu, notable examples of this kind relate to the Nadar community and to the Tondaimandala Tholuva Vellalars.

What is bad is not so much caste consciousness but caste rivalry. In this respect, I tend to feel that settled entitlements defuse rather than keep alive caste rivalries, because each caste knows its position and does not have to engage in a continual, running agitation to secure its desserts.

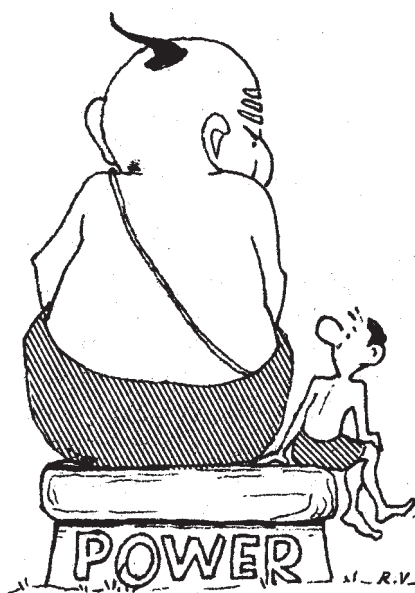
Coming to interpersonal relations between the Forward communities and

others in Tamilnadu, my personal experience is that civil society in Tamilnadu is pretty civilized. It is absolutely absurd to be told that Brahmins in Tamilnadu are ostracised or treated as 'Jews.' Having lived in the USA for some length of time, I am aware of the kind of prejudice which the Jewish community, even in that country, has to contend with. In Tamilnadu, the Forward communities, especially the Brahmins, to which community I myself belong, should realise how fortunate they are. In fact, the whole problem in recent years is the rise of what might be called Brahmin militancy. It is due to several factors, principally the emergence of the BJP as a significant factor in national politics and the recent anti-Mandal mania in the North. These developments have given an injection of adrenalin to the Tamilnadu Brahmin Association. In the name *ofllindutva*, some sections of the Forward communities are seeking to recapture their lost glory and their anti-DMK stance is being encouraged by parties such as the Congress and the AIADMK. If therefore, there is casteism, it is being promoted by these sources rather than by the Backward Classes.

Your detailed exposition of the history and impact of reservations in Tamilnadu has been very informative. Could you sum up its highlights and comment on what pointers it has for the North Indian situation?

I would sum up the distinguishing features of the Tamilnadu experience as follows. First, it has had an early beginning, as early as the 1920s, and, therefore, a long span by now. Second, the reservation policy could not have been implemented but for the coming to power of the non-Brahmin movement led by the Justice Party. Third, the Justice Party itself could not have had its early success but for the existence of an elite among the non-Brahmin communities. Their leaders like Dr. T.

M. Nair, K. V. Reddi Naidu, P. Tyagaraja Chetti and A. Ramaswami Mudaliar were in a position to successfully challenge the Brahmin elite in administration and politics, namely, men like C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, C. Rajagopalachari and S. Satyamurthi. Fourth, the ball was kept rolling in the sense that progressively the Justice Party elite was itself challenged by the Backward Classes League (1934), and subsequently by Vanniar leaders (since the 1950s) to secure better representation to the more genuinely Backward and Most Backward Classes. In this way, the reservation policy has



got crystallised over a period of some 60 years. Fifth, successive Chief Ministers of Tamilnadu, whether P. Subbaroyan and K. Kamaraj from the Congress or C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi and M.G. Ramachandran of the DMK and AIADMK, have been firmly committed to the principle of reservations. On this issue, the objective situation in Tamilnadu has reflected itself in a bipartisan approach.

Prima facie, the quantum of reservations for Other Backward Classes in Tamilnadu, which is at 50 percent, may seem large, but it is sizeably less than their population share

of 69 percent, and until 1980 such reservation was only 31 percent. The quantum of reservation is thus not unduly high. Nor, as I have explained earlier, is the list of Backward Classes excessively inclusive.

The long haul and the fairly good quantum of reservations have resulted in the social, educational, economic and representational advancement of Backward Classes. There is no reason to worry about the impact of reservations on efficiency of professional standards or on caste perpetuation or caste divisiveness. Compared to other parts of India, certainly, the people of Tamilnadu are rather a happy family.

One can see that the struggle for social justice in the North is bound to be a prolonged and painful one, not so much because the proportion of Forward communities is very much larger, but because they have wielded political, administrative, and academic power for too long. They are by now well entrenched, and in mood to give up their privileges. They can be made to do so only if the Backward Classes effect a united front and secure the support of other disadvantaged groups like the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the disadvantaged sections of the Muslims and Sikhs. The decision to implement the Mandal Report has opened up this possibility. One can only hope that it will mobilise a certain measure of historically necessary caste conflict. There is a Tamil saying that "Justice will come only if conflict arises."

Since Tamilnadu has such a long lead, how do you think preferential treatment should be restructured in the future gaining from past experience?

This is an interesting question. On account of its long history of preferential treatment, Tamilnadu may well be entering a second phase in its social evolution. In the long run, there can be no doubt that only an expanding

environment that provides more employment and faster growth can accommodate the aspirations of all sections of the people. Meanwhile, I feel we must pay much more attention to what might be called progress into the first echelon, especially of Most Backward Classes, SCs and STs. Having provided them with reservations in higher education and in public employment the effort must be to see that in terms of literacy and schooling their performance improves considerably, much more than it has in the past, so that they can fully avail themselves of opportunities provided by such reservations. Proceeding further, we should not be content with reservations alone, because they apply only to the public sector. Greater opportunities for technical training and vocational education will help the Backward and Most Backward Classes to benefit from opportunities in the private sector. We should not also look upon excellence and equity as necessarily antithetical. This means that when it comes to institutions of higher learning or institutions which are at the apex in the technical field, whether it is medicine or engineering, agriculture or veterinary sciences, the faculty should be constituted on the basis of proven excellence. We should not worry too much about the caste composition of people at this level, because the education or medical relief that they impart will largely be to the benefit the Backward and Most Backward Classes. In my experience, I have not found anyone in Tamilnadu, politicians or administrators or

The Changing Power Balance

Between 1892 and 1904, out of 16 successful Candidates for the I.C.S., 15 were Brahmins; in 1914, 93 out of 128 permanent district munsifs were Brahmins; in 1944, 452 out of 650 registered, university graduates were Brahmins (Rajni Kothari: *Caste in Indian Politics*.)

We give below another set of figures compiled to assess the proportion of jobs held by different castes in government employment during the British rule in 1935 and as they were 35 years after Independence in 1982. During British rule, the largest proportion of government jobs (40 percent) were held by Kayasthas. By 1982, their figure had dropped to seven percent. Muslims who were given special concessions by the British, had 35 percent of government jobs in 1935; in 1982 their representation has dropped to 3.5 percent. Christians, likewise favoured by the British, had 15 percent; by 1982 their figure had dropped to one percent. In 1935 the Brahmins (who constitute 3.5 percent of the population), had three percent of jobs, (fractionally less than the proportion of their population. Today they hold as much

as 70 percent of government jobs (presumably this refers only to gazetted posts). In the senior echelons of the civil service from the rank of deputy secretaries, upwards, out of 500 there are 310 Brahmins, that is 63 percent; of the 26 state chief secretaries, 19 are Brahmins; of the 27 Governors and Lt. Governors, 13 are Brahmins; of the 16 Supreme Court judges, nine are Brahmins; of the 330 judges of the High Courts, 166 are Brahmins; of the 140 ambassadors, 58 are Brahmins; of the 98 vice-chancellors 50 are Brahmins; of 438 district magistrates, 250 are Brahmins; of the total 3,300 IAS officers 2,376 are Brahmins.

Interestingly, among the groups that gained in post Independence India are SCs/STs are Backwards Classes. They had hardly any government jobs under the British, but have now achieved a representation of nine percent, thanks to reservations.

(Extracted from Khuswant Singh's column in Sunday of 23-29 December 1990. He uses the statistics compiled by Brother Stanny of St. Anne's Church,

academics, whatever the caste or community they belong, disputing suggestions of this kind. I am, therefore, optimistic enough to believe that, in the natural course of things, the policy of reservations will lead to an upgradation

of merit and thereby to a situation where reservations, even if they are not formally phased out will become functionally otiose. We cannot, however, be impatient in this matter. We must bear in mind that the Forward communities have enjoyed their privileges for several generations. It is no great matter therefore if reservations continue to be relevant for another 75 or 100 years which is, after all, only three or four generations. □

