

Identifying Other Backward Classes

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Under Article 340 of the Indian Constitution, it is obligatory for the government to promote the welfare of the Other Backward Classes (OBC). The Mandal Commission which was set up for the purpose recommended 27 per cent job reservations in government services for the OBC. However, implementation of such recommendations has been vehemently opposed by a vocal section. This paper, presenting the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, brings out some technical errors in the criteria and approach adopted in identifying the OBC and their representation in government services. Alternative ways of identifying the deserving OBC have also been suggested.

TRANSFORMING India into an egalitarian society and strengthening its unity and integrity will remain a myth as long as the widening gap between the attitude of the rich and the poor, the high castes and the low castes, and the religious and ethnic majorities and the minorities towards each other is not changed significantly for the better. Such change in the people's attitude cannot be brought about overnight. Centuries old caste and religious practices which have got ingrained in their social-cultural milieu cannot be uprooted so easily. It is a long-term process, but it is imperative.

To bring all those who are considered the socially and economically backward on par with the rest of the society, it is a must that they should be assisted in all possible ways. Education which can accelerate amongst them the process not only of conscientisation but also of becoming economically independent should be made accessible to everybody. But given the heterogeneity in the existing socio-economic status, only some are able to climb the socio-economic ladder while the rest either remain at the same position or find their position declining. The practice of untouchability which is very much part of the tradition that we have inherited is prevalent even today. Hence the existing protective and welfare measures provided in the Constitution for the untouchables, officially known as the scheduled castes. However, besides the untouchables, there exists a huge proportion of people who are identified as socially and educationally backward classes. Talk of implementing similar welfare measures to this section (OBC) has ignited resentment especially among the high castes. However, it is the constitutional obligation of the government under Articles 340(1), 340(2) and 16(4) to promote the welfare of the OBCs.

Article 340(1)

The president may by order appoint a commission, consisting of such persons as he thinks, fit to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India and the difficulties under which they labour and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the union or any state to remove such difficulties and as to improve 'their condition and as to the grants that should be made, and the order appointing such commission shall define the procedure to be followed by the commission.

Article 340(2)

A commission so appointed shall investigate the matters referred to them and present to the president a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.

Article 15(4)

Nothing in this article or in clause 2 of Article 29 (protection of minorities) shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes.

Article 16(4)

Nothing in this 'article shall prevent the state from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class citizens which, in the opinion of the state, is not adequately represented in the services under the state.

Despite the fact that the term 'backward class' has appeared more than once in the Constitution of India, it has not been defined clearly in the Constitution. Thus there was a need to determine backwardness by means of adopting suitable criteria and identify all those who come under the backward classes category.

FIRST BACKWARD CLASSES COMMISSION

Adhering to Article 340, the First Backward Classes Commission was set up by a presidential order on January 29, 1953 under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar. Its terms of references were to:

- (a) determine the criteria to be adopted in considering whether any sections of the people in the territory of India in addition to the SC and ST as socially and educationally backward classes, using such criteria it was to prepare a list of such classes setting out also their approximate members and their territorial distribution;
- (b) investigate the conditions of all such socially and educationally backward classes and the differences under which they labour and make recommendations (i) as to the steps that should be taken by the union or any state to remove such difficulties or to improve their economic condition, and (ii) as to the grants that should be made for the purpose by the union or any state and the conditions subject to which such grants should be made;
- (c) investigate such other matters as the president may hereafter refer to them; and
- (d) present to the president a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.

For identifying socially and educationally backward classes, the commission adopted the following criteria:

- (1) Low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy of Hindu society.
- (2) Lack of general educational advancement among the major section of a caste or community.
- (3) Inadequate or no representation in government services.
- (4) Inadequate representation in the field of trade, commerce and industry.

The commission submitted its report on March 30, '1955. It had prepared a list of 2,399 backward castes or communities for the entire country and of which 837 had been classified as the 'most backward' Some of the most noteworthy recommendations of the commission were:

- (i) undertaking caste-wise enumeration of population in the census of 1961;
- (ii) relating social backwardness of a class to its low position in the traditional caste hierarchy of Hindu society;
- (iii) treating all women as a class as 'backward';
- (iv) reservation of 70 per cent seats in all technical and professional institutions for qualified students of backward classes;

- (v) minimum reservation of vacancies in all government services and local bodies for other backward classes on the following scale: class I = 25 per cent; class II = 33½ per cent; class III and IV = 40 per cent.

There was considerable divergence of opinion among the members of the commission as to what should be the criteria of backwardness. However, the commission in its final report recommended 'caste as the criteria to determine backwardness. But this report was not accepted by the government as it feared that the backward classes excluded from the caste and communities selected by the commission may not be considered and the really needy would be swamped by the multitude and would hardly receive special attention. Thus, there was a need of a second backward classes commission.

MANDAL COMMISSION

The decision to set up a second backward classes commission was made official by the president on January 1, 1979. The commission popularly known as the Mandal Commission, its chairman being B. P. Mandal. It submitted the report in December 1980. The terms of reference for the commission were:

- (1) to determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes;
- (2) to recommend the steps to be taken for their advancement;
- (3) to examine the desirability or otherwise for making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in their favour; and
- (4) to present a report setting out the facts found by the commission..

The Mandal Commission adopted various methods and techniques to collect the necessary data and evidence to fulfil the above objectives.

The commission prepared three questionnaires: one for the state government, another for the central ministries and yet another for the general public besides its extensive tours in the country to collect the necessary evidence. A socio-educational field survey was organised under the panel of experts with M. N. Srinivas as chairman. This study also included caste studies, analysis of data, village monographs and study of legal and constitutional issues. To identify the socially and educationally backward classes, the commission adopted 11 criteria which could be grouped under three major headings: social, educational and economic. The 11 criteria are as follows:

Social

- (i) Castes/classes considered as socially backward by others.
- (ii) Castes/classes which mainly depend on manual labour for their livelihood.
- (iii) Castes/classes where at least 25 per cent females and 10 per cent males above the state average get married at an age below 17 years in rural areas and at least 10 per cent females and 5 per cent males do so in urban areas.
- (iv) Castes/classes where participation of females in work is at least 2 per cent above the state average.

Educational

- (v) Castes/classes where the number of children in the age group of 5-15 years who never attended school is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (vi) Castes/classes where the rate of student drop-out in the age group of 5-15 years is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (vii) Castes/classes amongst whom the proportion of matriculates is at least 25 per cent below the state average.

Economic

- (viii) Castes/classes where the average value of family assets is at least 25 per cent below the state average.
- (ix) Castes/classes where the number of families living in kuccha houses is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
- (x) Castes/classes where the source of drinking water is beyond half a kilometer for more than 50 per cent of the households.
- (xi) Castes/classes where the number of households having taken consumption loans is at least 25 per cent above the state average.

Of these three groups, separate weightage was given to indicators of each group. A weightage of three points each was given to all the social indicators. Educational indicators were given two points each. And economic indicators were given one point each. In addition to social and educational, economic indicators were considered important as they directly flowed from social and educational backwardness mainly to highlight the fact that socially and educationally backward classes are economically backward also.

It can be understood from the values given to each indicator that the total adds up to 22. All these 11 indicators were applied to all the castes covered by the survey for a particular state. All castes which had a score of 50 per cent (i.e., 11 points) or above while applying the said score were listed as socially and educationally backward and the rest were treated as 'advanced'. Using the above-mentioned criteria, the commission identified 3,743 caste groups as other backward classes.

Figures of caste-wise population are not available beyond 1931. So the commission used 1931 census data to calculate the number of OBCs. The population of Hindu OBCs was derived by subtracting from the total population of Hindus, the population of SC and ST and that of forward Hindu castes and communities, and it worked out to be 52 per cent. Assuming that roughly the proportion of OBCs amongst non-Hindus was of the same order as amongst the Hindus, population of non-Hindu OBCs was also considered as 52 per cent of actual proportion of their population of 16.16 per cent or 8.40 per cent. The total population of Hindu and non-Hindu OBC therefore naturally added up to nearly 52 per cent of the country's population.

The following are the recommendations of the Mandal Commission to improve the lot of the OBCs.

The population of OBCs which includes both Hindus and non-Hindus is around 52 per cent of the total population. However only 27 per cent of reservation was recommended owing to the legal constraint that the total quantum of reservation should not exceed 50 per cent. The already existing reservation for SC and ST is in tune with their proportion to total population, i.e., 15 per cent for SC and 7.2 per cent for ST and together amounts to 22.5 per cent is to be taken into account, while counting the total percentage of reservation. States which have already introduced reservation for OBC exceeding 27 per cent will not be affected by this recommendation. With this general recommendation the commission proposed the following over-all scheme of reservation for OBC:

- (1) Candidates belonging to OBC recruited on the basis of merit in an open competition should not be adjusted against their reservation quota of 27 per cent.
- (2) The above reservation should also be made applicable to promotion quota at all levels.
- (3) Reserved quota remaining unfilled should be carried forward for a period of three years and de-reserved thereafter.
- (4) Relaxation in the upper age limit for direct recruitment should be extended to the candidates of OBC in the same manner as done in the case of SCs and STs.

- (5) A roster system for each category of posts should be adopted by the concerned authorities in the same manner as presently done in respect of SC and ST candidates.

These recommendations in total are applicable to all recruitment to public sector undertakings both under the central and state governments, as also to nationalised banks.

All private sector undertakings which have received financial assistance from the government in one form or other should also be obliged to recruit personnel on the aforesaid basis.

All universities and affiliated colleges should also be covered by the above scheme of reservation.

Although education is considered an important factor to bring a desired social change, 'educational reform' was not within the terms of reference of this commission. The commission was expected to suggest palliative measures within the existing framework.

Representation of SC/ST and OBC Employees in Government Services

Category of Employees	Total Number of Employees	Percentage of SC/ST	Percentage of OBC
Class-I	174043	05.68	04.69
Class-II	912786	18.81	10.63
Class- III & IV	484646	24.40	24.40
All classes	1571475	18.71	12.55

Source. Report of the Backward Classes Commission (1980), First part, p 42.

The commission suggested that there should be additional funds and framing of integrated scheme for creating proper environment and incentives for services and purposeful studies.

To promote literacy the following measures were suggested:

- (i) An intensive time-bound programme for adult education should be launched in selected pockets with high concentration of OBC population; (ii) Residential schools should be set up in these areas for backward class students to provide a climate specially conducive to serious studies. All facilities in these schools including board and lodging should be provided free of cost to attract students from poor and backward homes; (iii) Separate hostels for OBC students with above facilities will have to be provided; (iv) Vocational training was considered imperative.

It was recommended that seats should be reserved for OBC students in all scientific, technical and professional institutions run by the central as well as state governments. The quantum of reservation should be the same as in the government services, i e, 27 per cent. These states which have already reserved more than 27 per cent seats for OBC students will remain unaffected by these recommendations. Students of OBCs selected in reserved quota should be given special coaching assistance.

Members of village vocational communities who want to set up small-scale industries on their own should be given suitable institutional finance and technical assistance. And similar assistance should be extended to those promising OSC candidates who have undergone special vocational training. In this regard, separate financial institutions should also be established. It was also considered imperative that all state governments should create a separate network of financial and technical institutions to foster business and industrial enterprise among OBC as a part of its overall strategy to uplift them.

The commission felt that a radical transformation of the existing production relations is the most important single step that can be carried out for this welfare and upliftment of all backward classes. The commission recommended that all state governments should be directed to enact and implement progressive legislation.

It also suggested that a part of surplus land as a result of the operation of ceiling laws should be allotted not only to SC and ST but also to OBC landless labourers.

The Mandal Commission recommended that all development programmes at the state level especially designed for OBC should be financed by the central government in the same manner and to the same extent as done in the case of SC and ST. The commission suggested that the entire operations of its recommendations should be reviewed only after 20 years.

Although all these recommendations and suggestions are acceptable to many, there are differences of opinion in supporting them fully. There are two major reasons for it. One arises out of total ignorance of the objectives behind such recommendations and also due to lack of understanding of the real cause for the escalating problem of unemployment.

Reserving 27 per cent of government jobs to those who have been identified as socially and educationally backward classes by the Mandal Commission besides the existing 22.5 per cent for SC/ST has caused a sense of fear among non-SC/ST and OBC students that their future is doomed, all their efforts to achieve higher education will become meaningless, and all their job opportunities are going to be usurped by SC/SI' and OBC. It is to be remembered that even if we leave all the job opportunities in open competition, the unemployment problem is not going to be solved.

Ignoring or being ignorant of the reality, students went berserk during the anti-reservation agitation. Unfortunately, some of them went to the extent of self-immolation. The media and some of the political leaders eulogised and glorified such incidents instead of condemning and discouraging them. Such incidents were portrayed as protest against casteism and communalism. As a result, many students tried to immolate themselves. While extending my heartfelt sympathy to those parents who lost their children in the anti-reservation agitation, I also question the inhuman way in which some of the innocent students and even a few school children have been forcefully burnt by the agitating students and named them all as acts of self-immolation against Mandal Commission recommendations. These 'conscious and patriotic' students never protested when innocent Sikhs and Muslims were ruthlessly murdered, when Harijan women were raped and murdered, when a few Harijans were forced to eat human excreta, when Harijans were killed *en masse* in rural areas and when a Harijan cop was stoned to death just for taking shelter for a few minutes on the steps of Hanuman temple.

The other arises out of a critical approach and understanding of the -justification attributed and criteria adopted to the recommendations of Mandal Commission. It is represented by some of the intellectuals and critics of Mandal Commission. Social scientists and intellectuals, have opposed the Mandal Commission's recommendations on the ground that there are many technical errors in the methodology adopted for identifying the educationally and socially backward people. They oppose it also on the ground that the justification advanced for reserving 27 per cent government jobs for OBC is not valid. First of all, let us see what are the criteria that the Mandal Commission adopted to come to the conclusion that the representation of OBC employees in government services is lesser than that of SC and ST.

Criteria furnished to central government offices for identifying OBC employees for both Hindu and non-Hindu communities:

- (a) *In respect of employees belonging to the Hindu Communities:*
 - (i) an employee will be deemed to be socially backward if he does not belong to any of the three twice born (Dvij) 'varnas', i.e., he is neither a brahmin, nor a kshatriya/nor a vaishya; and
 - (ii) he will be deemed to be educationally backward if neither his father nor his grandfather had studied beyond the primary level.
- (b) *For non-Hindu Communities:*
 - (i) an employee will be deemed to be socially backward if either (1) he is a convert from those Hindu communities which have been defined as socially backward as per para (a) (i) above, (2) in case he is not such a convert, his parental income is below the prevalent poverty line, i.e., Rs 71 per head per month.
 - (ii) he will be deemed to be educationally backward if neither his father nor his grandfather had studied beyond the primary level.

It may be noted, an employee will qualify for membership of OBC only if, both socially and educationally, he is found to be backward according to the above criteria.

Of the various criteria adopted to identify the number of OBC employees in government services, let us see criteria (a)(i) and (a)(ii) which may be called the first set of criteria and compare them with all those three criteria (v, vi and vii) adopted to identify the educationally-backward people which may be called the second set of criteria.

While looking at these two sets of criteria, there seems to be some technical errors in the nature of criteria adopted for the purpose. The commission instead of finalising the list of OBCs first and then identifying among them the number of those employed in government services, using some criteria arbitrarily, had already finalised the list of the so-called OBC employees in government services who may or may not fall in the category of OBC according to the criteria adopted later by Mandal. Second, when a particular set of criteria was adopted to decide whether or not an employee in government service is socially and educationally backward, the same set of criteria should have been adopted to decide whether or not an individual is socially and educationally backward. Had the commission adopted the same set of criteria the population of OBC would not have accounted for 52 per cent. As the proportion of OBC employees in government service is found to be less, the proportion of OBC population would have also been less. The II criteria model adopted later by Mandal to identify the OBC has in fact included a huge proportion of population into OBC category which according to the first set of criteria was not part of OBC. This can be understood if we look at the first set of criteria to identify the proportion of OBC employees in government services. The emphasis has been placed on the educational achievements of the employees' fathers and grandfathers instead of emphasising on the employees themselves. This is needed because the employment achievement of an individual depends directly on his/her educational achievement and not on his/her father's or grandfather's educational achievement although it may contribute indirectly in the longer run.

Let us now see how far the conclusion that the representation of OBC employees in government services is less than that of SC/ST. Table giving the details of representation of OBC and SC/ST employees in government services indicates that the percentage of OBC employees in Class-I and Class-II services accounts for 04.69 and 10.63 respectively whereas the same of SC/ST accounts for 05.68 and 18.81 respectively. It is rather unbelievable. The OBC who had the access to start their educational career next to Brahmins but much before the SCs and STs would definitely be having more number of educated fathers and grand-

fathers than that of the SCs and STs. In that case the number of OBC employees in government services is bound to be much more than that of the SCs and STs. B K Roy Burman aptly questions, "can any one with intimate knowledge of the social scene in India say that even among the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes there would be many persons in Class-I jobs and, whose fathers or grandfathers would not have read upto primary level" (*Mainstream*, September 29, 1990). Then what could be the reason?

Let us see criterion number a(ii) of the first set of criteria which declares that an employee will be deemed to be educationally backward if neither his father nor his grandfather had studied beyond the primary level. It is clear that the commission while counting the number of OBC employees in government services has taken into consideration only those employees whose fathers or grandfathers had not studied beyond primary level and it has left all other employees whose fathers or grandfathers had studied beyond primary level. This is perhaps an important reason why the proportion of OBC employees in government services is seen to be lesser than that of SC/ST.

Let us also see the criteria adopted to determine the educational backwardness of OBCs. While in the first set of criteria to decide whether or not an employee comes under OBC, the educational achievement of employees' fathers or grandfathers has been considered an important criteria, and in the second set of criteria to decide whether or not the OBC community as a whole is educationally backward or advanced the emphasis has been laid only on the children's educational achievement ignoring the educational status of their parents and grandparents. The educational status of their parents and grandparents should be given the main consideration as only such criteria can reveal the historical reasons behind their present educational status.

The Mandal Commission's recommendations have been opposed on the ground that the term 'backward classes' enshrined in the Constitution under Article 340 does not imply those whom Mandal has identified as the other backward classes. So, a clear understanding of the meaning of the term is imperative.

The meaning attached to the term 'backward classes' as understood in recent days, seems to contradict the meaning attached to it during pre-independence period. For many during pre-independence period, the term backward class was a synonym for untouchables. Over a period of time the term has come to mean different things in different places.

The term backward classes first acquired a technical meaning in the princely state of Mysore. Preferential recruitment of backward communities was instituted in 1921 and they were defined as "all communities other than Brahmans, who are not adequately represented in the public service'. In 1928 the Hartog Committee defined backward classes in their glossary as "castes or classes which are educationally backward. They include the depressed classes, aboriginals, hill tribes, and criminal tribes. The Indian central committee not only excludes from backward classes the word depressed classes but includes in addition to tribal, some strata of the caste population. The state committee in Bombay proposed in 1924 that a wider group should be called backward classes which should be divided into depressed classes (untouchables); aboriginals, and hill tribes; other backward classes (including wandering tribes). They also noted, it should be renamed 'intermediate caste. According to Simon Commission the term backward classes refers to 'intermediate castes'.

The-United Provinces Hindu Backward Classes League founded in 1929 were of the view that the term 'depressed' carried a connotation of untouchability in the sense of causing pollution by touch as in the case of Madras and Bombay and that many communities were reluctant to, identify themselves as 'depressed'. The league suggested the term 'Hindu backward' as a more suitable nomenclature. The list of 115 castes submitted included all candidates for the untouchable category as well as a stratum above. They were described as low socially, educationally and economically. In 1937 Travancore discarded the

nomenclature 'depressed classes' and substituted the term 'backward communities' to include all educationally and economically backward communities. The term backward classes was used in Madras to refer the strata above the untouchables. In 1934, the Madras Provincial Backward Classes League was founded for the purpose of securing separate treatment from the "forward non-Brahmin communities". In November 1947 separate reservations were provided for these backward Hindus in the Madras service.

It is apparent now that there was no definite meaning attached to the term backward classes at the all-India level. Although the meaning of backward classes varied from state to state, representatives from Madras, Mysore and Bombay by the time of constituent assembly were of the opinion that the term backward classes was a distinct term with technical meaning. Example, in Mysore the backward classes were all but Brahmins, in Madras the backward classes were referred to a stratum of non-untouchable Hindu castes, and in Bombay the backward classes were not only SC and ST but also others who were economically, educationally and socially backward.

Although, there was no nationwide accepted definition for the term backward class, the term has been used in the Indian Constitution. However, as stated earlier, nowhere in the Constitution, the term "socially and educationally backward" has been defined. Ambedkar, the chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution, when asked about the criteria to be followed to determine the social and educational backwardness, explained, "we have left it to be determined by each local government. A backward community is a community which is backward in the opinion of the government" As a result social scientists have come out with varying definition of who should be and who should not be called OBC. There is no consensus even among different state governments in this matter. While some have favoured the definition of OBC of Mandal, some others have rejected it altogether.

I have earlier expressed the view that the term socially and educationally backward classes (SEBC) as it appears in the Indian Constitution under Article 340 is the same as the SC and ST and it only reflects their low position in the caste hierarchy and their educational backwardness. I have also expressed that the OBC in practice do not like to be identified as socially backward although they claim to be so just for some government benefits (*Mainstream*, August 18, 1990, p 19). This judgment becomes more and more true in the light of the increasing number of atrocities meted out on SC by the high castes most of whom come under OBC category. Andre Beteille and M N Srinivas have also expressed almost similar opinion on this issue. Andre Beteille has rightly said "reservation to SC and ST are for all their limitation directed basically towards the goal of greater equality over all. Reservation for OBC and for religious minorities, whatever advantages they may have are directed basically towards balance of power" (*The Times of India*, September 11, 1990).

But it does not mean that all those who have been identified as SEBC are not so. There are castes among OBC which suffer from caste discrimination like the SC and ST. These caste groups should not be in the list of OBC instead they should be incorporated in the list of SC and according to the increase in the total SC population arising out of such inclusion of new castes in the list of SC, the percentage of reservation available for SC should be increased.

There is another aspect in the Mandal Commission's analysis of 'socially and educationally backward classes' which needs some modification. To understand the meaning of the term 'socially and educationally backward classes' better, it may be bifurcated into two: 1. socially backward classes, 2 educationally backward classes. These terms are applicable for both Hindu and non-Hindu communities. According to the Mandal Commission, people belonging to socially backward classes among Hindus are those Hindus who fall below the high castes in the caste hierarchy who are also known as the middle castes or intermediate castes and whose economic condition needs to be improved. Obviously the

main emphasis here has been laid first on identifying those castes which are considered socially backward and then among them the 'economically backward classes' have been identified. By and large, caste has been considered the important criterion to determine individuals' social backwardness. If this is taken as valid, then how can we call the Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and other religious minorities which do not or which are not supposed to believe in caste system socially backward? Is it because they are numerically minority? or is it because they believe in altogether different religious faith, values and customs, or does it mean that all the non-Hindu religions are inferior to Hindu religion? However, Mandal treated all those among non-Hindu religions who were educationally and economically backward as socially backward. This certainly needs modification. The term 'socially backward' is applicable only for those Hindus who compared to the high castes, are considered low castes. It cannot be applicable to people belonging to non-Hindu religions. Thus all those caste Hindus who are both educationally and economically backward according to the Mandal's criteria may be called socially, educationally and economically backward castes (SEBCt) and all those among non-Hindu religions who are both educationally and economically backward may be called 'other backward classes' (OBCI). Identifying among the SEBCt and OBCI the really deserving individuals as M N Srinivas suggested may not be an easy task in a country like ours. It is relatively easy to identify the deserving families among SEBCt and OBCI. Identifying deserving families instead of deserving individuals may help avoid problems like many individuals in the same family trying to avail all the existing provisions instead of one or two individuals in every family making use of such provisions.

There is yet another aspect of the Mandal Commission's recommendations which needs modification, i.e. recognising caste identities in non-Hindu religions which do not believe in caste system. Most Christians and Buddhists in India were untouchables in the Hindu fold. They embraced non-Hindu religions mainly to get rid of the humiliating practices of caste discrimination meted out to them by the high caste people. If this is the main cause of embracing non-Hindu religions, then why should the government insist on caste identities in non-Hindu religions. We can take the case of neo-Buddhists. Most of them are those who were once untouchables. They need to identify themselves as SC to take advantage of any government assistance although they have embraced Buddhism. We can refer the criterion number (b)(i) of those criteria adopted by Mandal to identify the OBC employees in government services. This seems to defeat the very purpose of untouchables renouncing Hinduism and embracing non-Hindu religions. The better way of helping them all will be that they all should be treated as part of the religious minorities, and among them we should identify the educationally and economically backward families. As most of the converts (low caste people) are economically poor and educationally backward, all of them are bound to become the beneficiaries of those provisions extended to the non-Hindu religions/religious minorities/OBCI.

The SEBCt and OBCI should be further divided into three categories: (1) those who are economically backward but educationally advanced; (2) those who are educationally backward but economically advanced; and (3) those who are both economically and educationally backward. All these three categories should be measured taking into account their present educational and economic status.

For those families in which most of the members are educationally advanced but economically backward, there should be less or no percentage of reservation for admission in educational institutions but maximum percentage of job reservation in government services. For those families in which the per capita income of most members is very high but their educational advancement is very low, there should be less or no job reservation but maximum reservation for admission in educational institutions. And for those families which are both

educationally and economically backward, there should be maximum reservation for both education and employment. The quantum of reservation should be decided taking into consideration the overall socioeconomic development of the various castes and religious communities.

CONCLUSION

The government should make a national level survey immediately and list out all the caste groups including that of the forward castes, and their socio-economic and educational status. The survey should take note of all the technical errors found in the various criteria adopted by Mandal and formulate more rational criteria and scientific approach towards identifying the really deserving people within the castes and communities of each stratum of our society.

The survey should not mix the socially, educationally and economically backward castes (SEBCt) with the other backward classes of non-Hindu religions, i e, the religious minorities (OBCI). After finalising the list of SEBCt and OBCI, we should find out the proportion of SEBCt and OBCI employees in government services. The quantum of reservation should be finalised only after undertaking this exercise and understanding the magnitude of the problem of each caste and communities. For those who are economically well-off but educationally backward, there should be reservation for education. For those who are educationally advanced but economically backward there should be reservation for employment. And for those who are both educationally and economically backward there should be reservation for both education and employment.

Pointing out the various technical errors and limitations of the recommendations of Mandal Commission, as we have discussed so far, is not an effort to oppose the move directed towards uplifting the OBC, instead it is an attempt to make such efforts more rational, just and logical which in turn could avoid all possible criticism against such a move in future.

Whatever be the criticism advanced against the recommendations of Mandal Commission, none can question its objective of uplifting those sections which are really backward—backward in terms of their educational and economic achievements.

It is difficult obviously to accept the logic of giving admission in educational institutions and jobs in government services 'to students/candidates who are relatively less qualified in terms of required marks/experience, and not doing the same to students/candidates who are relatively more qualified. To understand the meaning of this logic, we should go beyond merely looking at the marks, experience of the concerned students or candidates. We should not ask a sweeper's son to compete with a professor's son to judge the competence of these two students. "There is equality only among equals. To equate unequals is to perpetuate inequality"

Economic and Political Weekly, June 6, 1992, pp.1203-1207.