

By AMITA KANEKAR



Brahmin Reservations amid Atrocious Exclusion

I have written in the past about how the policy of caste-based reservations enjoined by the Constitution is blatantly violated in Goa. This is despite a number of clear-cut Supreme Court judgements and Central Government notifications and orders, right from the 1990s. These notifications specify that reservations were to be implemented, both in new recruitment and for promotions, on the basis of post-based reservations rosters. These rosters are supposed to clearly list all the posts in a department or a cadre, beginning with the situation in 1997, and also to specify whether these posts are reserved or unreserved, and, if reserved, for whom. These post-based rosters are to be prepared for every department/cadre, and would thus show the backlog of reserved posts to be filled, during any fresh recruitment after 1997.

Such are the rules, and they are quite easy to understand. But that's if you want to understand them. What we have in Goa, among those entrusted to govern us, is a complete absence of will to follow these rules. Thus, although the government declared as long back as 2002 that it would be preparing these rosters, which were to be verified by the Social Welfare department and the Tribal Welfare Department among others, the declaration was not followed by action. An example is Goa University. Beginning in 2014, concerned citizens began pointing out, via open letters and petitions to the authorities, the flawed system of recruitment and promotion at the Goa University. They pointed out that the rosters of the University were shockingly incorrect, and that the University was not using them for recruitment/promotion as it was supposed to do; they demanded that all recruitment/promotion be halted until the rosters were corrected and verified, so that they could be used as the base for calculating the posts to be reserved, as mandated by law. Thanks to the efforts and persistence of these citizens, at long last, in 2017, the University committed, before the SC/ST Commission, to correcting and verifying its rosters.

But, having made this commitment, what does the University do? In almost the same breath, it advertises for new recruitment! As pointed out by the Social Justice Action Committee-Goa, this latest advertisement (29/12/2017) shows very few reserved posts, even less than the (unverified) backlog declared by the University before the State Legislative Assembly not long before, e.g. the backlog of unfilled Scheduled Tribe (ST) posts in the Assistant Professor cadre, as mentioned in the Assembly, were 11, and for Other Backward Classes (OBC) 15; in

the advertisement, the ST posts in Assistant Prof cadre are 3 (i.e. 8 less) and OBC just 1 (14



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In other words, the story goes on. Citizens may complain and petition, investing their own time, energy, and personal resources, but the authorities ignore, or promise, or forget, or delay, or do a thousand other tricks to continue as before. What is clear, from the efforts of the past 3-4 years, is that all this is cold-blooded and deliberate, for the result is always the same: posts meant for the discriminated-against communities are snatched by those from privileged communities. E.g. Goa University has filled only some 5 reserved posts in over a 100 total teaching posts, i.e. less than 5% at the best of times, when it should be 41%. In other words, more than 36% posts have been robbed by the privileged, with the help of the government.

In other words, those who govern us are not actually against caste-based reservations. It is just that they are committed to the reservation that already exists – for privileged castes.

This default reservation came out in the open during the recent debate over the naming of the square of the St Sebastian Church (popularly known as Pandvam Copel), in Margao. Criticism of the suggestion that the square be named after Chandrakant Keni led to public accusations of ‘Christian Jihad’ by one Saraswat supporter of the Saraswat Keni. Of course, it is obvious that the accuser has no knowledge of what jihad means; he was just following its meaning in BJP-speak, which is terrorism. By these fascist norms, if a Christian opposes Keni’s name—citing his closeness to the RSS, or any other reason—this is not a democratic discussion but terrorism. But a Bamon demanding Keni’s name is not a problem at all, it is just natural and normal. So natural and normal, that even when some peace-keepers proposed other names to resolve the dispute, they could only come up with Bamon ones.

Because the name of almost everything in Goa is reserved for Bamon, barring the odd Bandodkar here and there. Even the non-Goans whose names are found here, like Nehru, Shyama Prasad Mukerjee, and Sant Sohirobanath were all Brahmins (and Saraswats, according to some). The exception is Gandhi, but one road to him is a national obligation.

The dominant communities usually claim that their antipathy to the Constitution-enjoined reservations stems from a respect for 'merit'. Now, the difficulties overcome by candidates from discriminated-against communities is obvious proof of greater intelligence, determination, and thus merit. But the critics are not interested in genuine merit; what they mean is the merit that comes by birth, the kind of merit celebrated by Keni. For Keni was no ordinary Goan Saraswat. He was a Saraswat who articulated the pride of being Saraswat, along with self-aggrandising legends, in his book *'The Saraswats'*; who was closely associated with one of the traditional seats of Goan Brahmanism, the Partagal Matha; who championed Nagari-script Konkani, a Brahmanical language par excellence. In other words, he ticks all the boxes for one hundred per cent Brahmanism. Where will you get 'merit' like this?

Thus the real reason that the dominant communities hate, and try to scuttle, the Constitution-enjoined reservations is that these challenge the unwritten caste-based reservations that they themselves enjoyed for centuries, in institutions and in public life - and which they want to preserve even today.

(With thanks to the Social Justice Action Committee - Goa)

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