



By AMITA KANEKAR

The Continuing Saga of Goa's Reservations Scam

Since 2014, when a reservation scam at Goa University hit the headlines, there has been some effort on the part of citizens to get the reservations policy, as mandated by the Constitution, implemented in Goa. But 3 years down the line, as a recent petition to the University from the Social Justice Action Committee (SJAC) shows, things haven't changed. The problem is that, behind Goa's liberal and cosmopolitan bonhomie, is a brahmanical society, alive and kicking. Caste-based reservations are supposed to ensure representation of all communities, and especially traditionally discriminated-against ones, in government and educational institutions. But not only does the establishment, dominated as it is by upper castes, refuse to implement the law, it tries to brainwash us with a lot of propaganda about how reservations run counter to merit.

It isn't surprising to hear these 'meritorious' types, i.e. the privileged castes, blaming reservations for every problem, from not getting a job to the sorry state of any department or profession. This recent bye-election in Panjim even saw a candidate promise to remove reservations if he won. He is not likely to win of course, but his socially-regressive promise shows how successful the anti-reservation propaganda has been.

The truth though is that reservations are hardly implemented in Goa. Even in education, many reserved seats remain vacant till they are filled by unreserved (UR) candidates. This is not because SC/ST/OBC students are not interested, but because the educational facilities that they are entitled to, like free hostels and library support, are never advertised and rarely provided. Plus they are asked to pay their fees up front and then wait for a refund, which many obviously cannot afford.

In the case of jobs, it is worse. As I have pointed out in 2 earlier articles on this issue, the subversion of job reservations is commonly done by fudging the reservation rosters, or by not following the proper procedures in recruitment, admissions, advertisement, etc, or by simply acting as if reservations don't apply.

At the heart of the matter are the reservation rosters. These documents are supposed to keep a record of all the posts available in any job category (like Assistant Professor or Registrar), which of these posts are reserved and for whom, and who occupied/occupies them; in other words, they provide all information required for new recruitment. They also show how many reserved posts are occupied by UR candidates, which becomes the 'backlog' of reservations. This backlog is supposed to be filled as a priority in any new recruitment, as per Supreme Court rulings, since without filling the backlog the Constitutionally-mandated percentage of reserved posts can never be achieved.

All of this means that it is important for a casteist administration to keep these reservation rosters completely messed up.

What is usually done, as in the case of Goa University, is to show a reduced number of posts in each category than is actually the case, thus drastically reducing the backlog of reservations to be filled. The SJAC petition has provided a list of 25 people who occupied/occupy faculty posts and are completely missing on the University's reservation rosters.

But even the reduced backlog is ignored during recruitment drives, though it is supposed to be a priority. The Goa government's provision for caste-based reservations is 41%. So, for example, if there are 100 vacant posts, and the backlog is 30, then the advertisement should be for 30 reserved posts first. The remaining 70% is to be advertised separately, after being divided on the basis of 41% reserved, 59% unreserved.

The Goa University has been in the news for violations from 2014. Then they had faced complaints and detailed critiques from Bahujan and tribal applicants. The mistakes in the rosters were pointed out, along with the wrong procedures followed for the advertisements, interviews, etc. In 2016, the University faced further complaints regarding reservations in the appointment of Assistant Registrars. The complainants approached Goa's Commissioner of ST/SC, and the latter too explained the problems in detail to the officers of the University. A petition on this was also submitted to the Chancellor of the University, viz. Goa's Governor.

Despite all this, the University has messed up again in its July 2017 advertisement for recruitment. The rosters remain seriously defective, with many posts missing, and the OBC reservation, which was increased from 19.5% to 27% long ago, still shown as 19.5%. The backlog has disappeared again, even though the University admitted in a question in the Goa Legislative Assembly on 1/8/2016, that there is indeed a backlog in faculty reservations.

And the posts advertised as reserved seem arbitrarily chosen—not following even the flawed rosters—and less than 41%. Thus, as the SJAC petition states, the University is not using its rosters as the basis for new recruitment, as mandated by law, but just as formalities or showpieces.

The advertisement has now been withdrawn (for other reasons); the SJAC petition demands that the University correct the rosters before advertising again. But it is important to note that all these so-called ‘mistakes’ result in a de facto reservation for the upper castes. For example, the total filled teaching positions in Goa University are 163, according to its rosters. Since 41% of these positions are supposed to be reserved, the number of reserved category teachers in the University should be 66. But the actual number of teachers belonging to reserved category communities is 4. Yes, 4 instead of 66, or less than 2.5% instead of 41%.

This is not exceptional; the SJAC has found similar situations in every government department and college they checked. So, while the dominant castes cry about how ‘they take all the jobs’, implying that SC/ST/OBC candidates have it easy, the same dominant castes are actually laughing all the way to the bank, or, in this case, University.

(First published in *O Herald*, dt: August 25, 2017)



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