

By AMITA KANEKAR



I have written in the past about how the policy of caste-based reservations enjoined by the Constitution is systematically violated in Goa. The purpose of this violation is simple, to deny representation in government and higher education to the marginalised communities, and ensure that these positions are illegally swallowed by the already over-represented dominant castes. After a recruitment scandal at the Goa University in 2014, Goa has seen many efforts by individual citizens and groups to get the authorities to implement the reservations policy fully and correctly, as mandated in the Constitution and laid down clearly by many court orders and government memorandums since the 1980s. Petitions were made to the University, the Governor and the state government; long meetings were held with many worthies in these institutions (most of whom shamelessly claimed ignorance of the rules, as if ignorance is a valid excuse); the issue was also discussed in the print media.

With what effect? Look at the situation at the well-known Dhempe College of Arts and Science, Panaji, as revealed by a recent complaint by a member of Goa's tribal communities. Following the resignation from the college of an Assistant Professor of Computer Science, it was found that the college had advertised for recruitment to the now-vacant post, but changed its reservation from Scheduled Tribes (ST) to Other Backward Classes (OBC). Now, changing the reservation of a post is not allowed for this was found to be a common management strategy to deny appointments to qualified candidates from the reserved categories. Instead, all posts in a cadre (like Assistant Professors) have to be permanently listed as ST, Scheduled Caste (SC), OBC, or Unreserved (UR). Each college has to maintain a reservation roster which lists all posts according to their reservation, along with the occupant's name and date of appointment, and whether this occupant belongs to the correct reservation category. This thus reveals the backlog of unfilled reservations, which the institution has to fill as a priority. This roster is to be verified every year by the state government's Social Welfare and Tribal Welfare departments, and is also to be available for public viewing.

The Dhempe College roster was not found on their website, so a copy was requested under the Right to Information. In response, just one page of the roster was provided. An appeal had to be filed before the RTI appellate authority before the whole roster showed up. On viewing it, one understands why the college had been hiding it – the roster was not up to date, nor verified by the Tribal Welfare department. Plus, it revealed that a huge number of reserved posts are occupied by UR persons (even after 1997, when this practice was banned), and, further, that reserved category candidates began to be appointed in Dhempe College only in 2017. Right now, although the college has six ST posts, it has made only one single ST appointment. So, there is a total of five ST vacancies that they are supposed to fill

as a priority – but they are removing an ST reservation instead!



Anti-Reservations and Pro-Reservations, at the same time
A complaint was made to the college regarding the change of reservation of the vacant ST post in Computer Science, but they ignored this and announced the date for interviews for the post. A petition was then filed before the State Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who in turn directed the college to cancel the interviews till the matter was resolved.

That is where things stand at the moment, with the petition being heard before the Commission. But, in a related development, a survey carried out recently (October-November 2021) by the Social Justice Action Committee – Goa, of 50 of the 80 government departments in Goa, found that none of the 50 display their reservation rosters on their websites, as required by law. In other words, the situation at Dhempe should not surprise anyone. For, if the government is not displaying its own rosters, it can only be because these rosters are not being maintained properly. And if the government is not interested in maintaining and displaying its own rosters correctly, why would they be bothered when others do the same? The result, of course, is a lot of very convenient ‘mistakes’ while calculating backlog, announcing recruitment, organising interviews, etc, etc. Convenient because all these so-called mistakes have only one single fall-out, that positions belonging to the ST, SC, and OBC communities go to the dominant castes.

Thus, one might say that little has changed with the attitude of the powers-that-be towards reservations, despite many efforts to rectify the situation. But there is actually one big change – the new Economically Weaker Section (EWS) reservation. This reservation of 10% for the ‘economically weaker’ (with a ridiculously high cut-off of Rs 8 lakhs per annum), but only of the dominant castes (it is explicitly not for the SC, ST and OBC communities), makes no Constitutional sense. As pointed out in *EWS: The Quota to end all Quotas* (The Ambedkar Age Collective, 2021), reservations were never intended to be an economic support; there are other schemes for that. Reservations were focussed on social justice, i.e. they were intended for ensuring representation in all fields to communities who were historically, and currently too, denied representation, opportunities, and even basic respect. In contrast, the dominant castes are already hugely over-represented in every powerful or lucrative position in Indian society, whether government (every branch) or academia or media or entertainment or sports.

This is true of Goa as well, as is very obvious all around us. Meanwhile, although the reservations for SC, ST and OBC were cleared decades ago, Goa delayed implementation for years; as for Dhempe college, as mentioned earlier, its roster shows the first reserved category appointees as late as 2017. The EWS quota, on the other hand, was billed into law

by the Centre in 2019, and the Goa government jumped to implement it in the very same year, followed by everyone else, as the Dhempe roster and recruitment advertisements both show. Thus, the attempts to marginalise the already-marginalised communities continue, even as formal reservations have now been added to the traditional ones enjoyed by the privileged.

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