

The Idea of Social Justice: A Sociological Analysis of the University Students' Reflections on the Reservation Policy in India

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ABSTRACT The reservation policy has been one of the contentious issues in India. This issue is being discussed and debated among politicians, media, students, and various other social players. Universities also offer a social space wherein students' opinion on this issue is shaped by different forms of affiliations and associations inside the campus. At this juncture, this study attempts to analyse the opinion of university students on different forms of reservation in India. It was carried out at the University of Hyderabad (UoH), Hyderabad. For this study, both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed. These 450 students were selected in proportion to the number of students in each reservation category based on the stratified sampling technique. This quantitative data was supplemented by the qualitative data collected from 20 selected students through an open-ended questionnaire. The data analysis shows that the universities students' opinion on reservation policy mostly corresponds to their social categories like caste, class, gender and religion.

INTRODUCTION

The people of the Indian society are virtually divided whenever the government of India declares an affirmative action policy popularly known as the reservation policy. It is common to see the number of posters, pamphlets and writings that demonstrate the highest forms of abusive expressions. The name reservation implies different meanings to different people. It is political; it is a positive discrimination for the policy makers; it is a reverse discrimination for the lower castes; it is a compromise of quality; and finally it is nothing but killing the constitutional spirit of equality of opportunities. One of the core issues which dominates the public sphere of India is the issue of reservation. Around 1,200 million of elite educated and ordinary peoples' lives are either directly or indirectly affected by the political economy of the reservation policy in educational institutions across the country. The critiques of reservation policy demand for right to merit, talent, ability, excellence, hard work, sincerity, self-respect, self-reliance society and the nation. But the

basic questions that bother public intellectuals, policy makers, and the ordinary people are: Why do the people demand reservation? What is the merit of the reservation? Who do they support or oppose reservation?

In order to answer the above questions one should refer to the debates on the history of reservations, its philosophy, its practices and its implications in shaping the nation towards an egalitarian or hierarchical mode. The debates on reservation were carried out in the light of the competing ideas on certain universal values or principles such as social justice, secularism, individual liberty, equality, equality of opportunity, merit, competence, efficiency and group identity (Shah 1991: 606; Rai 2002: 4313). Both the pro-reservationists and anti-reservationists have advanced their arguments based on these universal values and attributes. They brought out the intricacies of these contradicting principles on the idea of reservation policies.

As Visvanathan (2000) has remarked, the idea of reservation emerged as a part of multicultural liberal discourse¹ that recognised the different

forms of inequalities prevailing among different groups of people and argued in favor of positive discrimination for marginalised communities. The reservation policy occupies a prominent place in a multi-cultural society like India, where one could find different forms of inequalities based on caste, class, gender, religion and region. Though the history of reservation in India can be traced back to the colonial period, the reservation policies had been designed to serve the colonial interests (Shah 1991: 606) and even the impact was very limited. Only after the independence, the makers of the Indian constitution recognised social backwardness of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and provided them reservation in the central parliament and state assembly elections, government jobs and higher education institutions. Later, the Mandal Commission's² recommendation of a 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) had evoked public debates across India and agitation from upper caste students and scholars against it. The debates on the issue of reservation policy in India gradually gathered a momentum after the recommendation of the Mandal Commission.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to look into how the universities and other higher education institutions in India had reacted to this issue of the reservation policy and how students of these public institutions had formed their opinion and shaped their critical ideas on this. Various forums were established among university students in defence of reservation and against the reservation. These forums provided a platform where students could reflect on the reservation policy based on critical reasoning either in defence of or against it. Hence, the role of universities in shaping the public opinion on any public issue was incredible.

There is a close affiliation between university and society as the university reflects upon the society and responds to its demands. Universities are considered to be the centre of creative thinking and critical knowledge system (Visvanathan 2000). In fact, they ensure liberal and democratic space where students can freely express their opinion and practise their way of life in accordance with their own choices and interests. However, the questions as to whether the university really acts as a democratic space or the process of knowledge formation among students are still influenced by their embodied cultural values and ideologies need to be probed very carefully.

Purpose of the Study

A student's idea on the reservation policy is not simply a personal opinion, but is closely associated with various other issues like student politics on campus, campus culture, exposure to various ideologies, the social and economic background of students and their political affiliation. Each student takes his or her position either in defence of reservation policy or against it. Each one of them justifies his or her position based on certain universal criteria. The application of these universal values in this context implies different meanings. The position taken by the students, irrespective of pro or against, and the ways they defend their stand may bring out the nuances and intricacies of the reservation policy in the Indian context.

At this juncture, this study attempts to analyse the perception of students from a central university in India on the question of the reservation policy in general. It also tries to understand how students of different social categories are responding to reservations based on different categories- caste, gender, religion and disabled. This study was carried out at the University of Hyderabad (UoH), Hyderabad, India. It is one of the leading central universities in India that is entirely funded by the central government. This study intends to choose a university that exhibits different forms of diversity in terms of social background, caste, class, region, and religion. Considering these criteria, UoH was selected for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

- 1) To map out the debates and discussions on the reservation policy in India.
- 2) To analyse the interrelationship between social categories of the university students and their opinion on the reservation policies in India.

Conceptualisation of the Reservation Policy

In a democratic society, the government is expected to defend the rights of individuals and groups through constitutional provisions and policy intervention. The concept of reservation has also emerged within the realm of democratic principles. The reservation policy is one of the policy measures taken by the government to

promote social justice in a society where opportunities for socio-economic achievements are unequally distributed among different communities and groups. One of the objectives of this compensatory policy is to achieve positive equality through the provisions of preferential treatments to those who have been historically subjected to the practice of injustice and discrimination (Rai 2002: 4309).

The concept of social justice in this context is related to compensatory justice and distributive justice (Rai 2002). The distributive justice works on the conviction that all groups and communities in a society are not equal in terms of possession of resources and capabilities to improve their socio-economic status. In order to provide equal opportunities to all individuals and groups and to promote equality among them, the reservation is provided for them by the government. It is believed that social justice for deserving people would be realised through the compensatory policies.

One of the serious problems with the reservation policy is the identification and selection of the deserved and eligible people. Various criteria are applied to select the eligible people. The selection criteria vary in accordance with the country's composition of different groups and communities and their respective historical experiences. In America and South Africa, racial differences have been accepted as a criterion for reservation policies. In the Indian context, one's caste background and poor social and educational condition are recognised as the major eligible criteria for reservation quota. Apart from this, tribe and gender are the other criteria used for reservation policies, considering their historical backwardness.

In sum, it can be understood that reservation is an affirmative action or compensatory policy measure largely taken by the respective government or any other institution in favour of individuals or groups who are socially, economically and educationally backward. As was mentioned earlier, with the recognition of various forms of deprivations and historical exclusions it strives to achieve social justice for those who are experiencing different forms of inequalities in the unequal society.

Reservation Policies- Discussions and Debates in the Indian Context

The history of reservation policies in India is riddled with confrontation, controversies and

mass protest and agitation both in favour of and against reservation. It traversed from a tool of serving colonial interest during the British period to a mode of power sharing in the modern India (Shah 1991; Rai 2002). It can be traced back to the colonial period. The reservation in favour of certain castes and communities was first introduced in India by the rulers of some princely states³ like Mysore, Baroda and Kolhapur. It was mainly for the advancement of minorities and deprived sections of people who had not had enough representation in the administration (Das 2000: 3831-3832). These princely states were determined to modernise their states in education and the economy. As part of the modernisation project, special reservation was first implemented by some princely states for the advancement of minorities and deprived sections.

Later, the reservation policy was employed by the British Government as a tool to further their colonial interests as part of 'the divide and rule' policy. As Shah (1991: 606) pointed out, 'the objective of introducing reservation policy during the colonial period was to maintain the balance of power in society in order to facilitate their rule'. In the similar line, the attempt was first made by the British Government in the form of the Councils Act of 1909. As per the provision of the act, separate reservation was provided for Muslims in municipalities and district boards. A separate electorate for Muslims⁴ was also given under the provision of this act.

Then the reservation policy and separate electorates were further extended to minorities like Sikh and Anglo Indian Christians under the provision of the Government of India Act, 1919. SCs were also provided reservation in legislature and in public services for the first time in the history of India (Das 2000: 3833). These kinds of reservation policies with varied interests had not produced much impact on the social and economic conditions of marginalised sections of society. Mostly, the upper and middle class elites settled in the urban centres and forward caste officials in the British administration benefitted more.

They improved their socio-economic position, status and privileges in society by quickly responding to modernisation, western model scientific education, and English education. But other social and cultural impediments acted as

stumbling blocks for SCs, STs, minorities and other marginalised sections in their access to modern education and jobs in administration. Thus, it becomes very clear that the reservation policy during the colonial rule did not serve the real purpose, rather it remained as the tool in the hands of the British to maintain their balance of power in India.

The makers of the Indian constitution have accepted the quota-based reservation system to SCs, STs, socially and educationally backward classes, and weaker sections. Presently, the quota based reservation system is being provided in central and state public employments, higher educational institutions, except the institutions established and maintained by minorities for all three groups- SCs (15%), STs (7.5%) and OBCs (27%). However, reservation in the parliament and state legislatures are provided only to the SCs and STs. The constitution of India has the original provision for providing reservation for SCs and STs and some other provisions like Article 46 and 340 have also mandated that it is the responsibility of the state to promote the educational and economic interests of other backward classes. The aim of the reservation policy was to mitigate the social backwardness of communities and groups occupying an unequal position in society and to promote equal progress of all communities.

The founders of the free India were determined to establish India into a secular and democratic country. After realising the consequences of partition of India at the end of the British rule, they were against any social or political force that intends to divide the country on the basis of caste and religion. Caste and religion were conceived as a threat to national integration and unity of individuals. Even Ambedkar, the champion of Dalits' cause, was against any caste-based division, while supporting constitutional measures and policies for the emancipation of Dalits.

But, what should then be the eligible criteria for implementing the reservation policies? Should it be group-based reservation or individual-based reservation? The identifying criteria for reservation had created serious debates and confrontations in India. Having realised the historical experiences of India, caste was largely accepted as a major criterion for reservation. It was based on the conviction that the caste group or community was the main reason for

socio-economic and educational advancement or backwardness of an individual in India.

The Mandal Commission had identified around 3700 castes and communities (Radhakrishnan 1996) as socially and educationally backward and recommended 27% reservation for these OBC caste groups in higher education institutions and public employment. The recommendation of the Mandal commission was formally accepted by the central government in 1991. This created widespread agitation and demonstration among forward caste students and intelligentsia across the country in protest against the caste reservation policy. The anti-reservation forum called 'Youth for Equality' was formed by the forward caste students in New Delhi to raise their voice against the caste-based reservation. Some catchy slogans were popularised in this context. The slogans were: 'Caste-based policies are divisive, anti-secular and anti-progressive'; 'Individual is underprivileged, not the caste or class'; 'Castes are anti-national'⁵. The following will explain some of the key debates and discussions which emerged in the context of the post-Mandal recommendation.

Reservation is provided to all SC and ST communities irrespective of individual differences within the group. The historical injustice and discrimination meted out to SCs are considered to be the prime reason for their socio-economic backwardness. The STs are entitled to reservation, considering geographical isolation and various social exclusions. Both these arguments are centred around an idea that the life chances of an individual with access to higher education and high-profile government services are not determined by his or her economic status, but by the membership of a particular social group. Here, the individual differences in terms of capabilities, competence, academic qualification, economic status, and family background are not considered. Rather, the backwardness of the social groups as a whole is highly preferred to individual backwardness in the context of reservation policies in India (Shah 1985).

It is not necessarily true that all those who support anti-reservation policies are completely against any form of reservation. Most of them are against group-based reservation i.e., caste and community-based reservation. Instead, some of them are supporting limited individual-based reservation for poor and deserved individuals cutting across any caste and communi-

ty. They also argue that the lower strata of upper caste poor are deprived of opportunities in higher education and employment in the group-based reservation. According to them, the upper strata of lower castes have benefited more from the caste-based reservation.

Replying to these arguments advanced by the anti-reservationists, Shah (1985: 136) has pointed out that in the individual-based reservation, both the upper and lower strata of lower castes would be left out and it would largely favour the individuals from lower and middle strata of upper castes in view of their relative advantages. He concluded this point based on the data collected by the Centre for Social Studies, Surat in 1983. Shah (1985) further noted that '...the prevailing caste-based reservation has primarily benefited the upper strata of lower castes. This has sharpened the economic differences within lower castes. This is an inevitable process resulting from the existing capitalist system.' This is also a universal phenomenon in any reform-oriented policies (Shah 1991: 605).

The proponents of anti-reservation policies hold the view that the caste-based reservation is against the ideals of equality and secularism enshrined in the constitution. With the opposition to reservation, they seek to promote formal equality, i.e., all individuals in a country should be treated equally and should be given equal opportunities to fulfil their capabilities (Rai 2002: 4314). This implies equal treatment of unequal, disregarding the unequal positions and differences among individuals and groups. On the other hand, the proponents of reservation policies intend to promote proportional equality. The concept of proportional equality is based on the idea that everyone should be given proper external circumstances to improve their conditions of life. It insists more on the equality of achievement than the equality of opportunity (Rai 2002).

Shah (1991) has argued that given higher proportional representation of upper caste in administration, there is no place for power sharing with the disprivileged sections of people in the elite secularism. He further held that caste-based reservations do the secular function through the welfare policies to secure power, status and privilege for those who have been deprived of these so far. Thus, the concept of secularism holds different meaning for both the proponents and opponents of reservation. Another argument against reservation is that it is

divisive and a threat to national integration. According to this view, caste-based reservation promotes caste consciousness among individuals and leads to the politicisation of castes. The spirit of national integration in a multicultural society like India lies in the fact that the deprived people should be allowed to participate in administration, higher education and national politics that have been monopolised by a handful of castes and communities. The same point was rightly emphasised by the Mandal Commission that 'the objective of reservation for backward classes is to give them an immediate feeling of participation in the government' rather than their economic upliftment (Quoted in Shah 1991: 605; Rai 2002: 4310). Without removing the prevailing unequal conditions among various groups and promoting the socio-economic conditions of deprived sections, mere national integration in a formal sense would be more disastrous.

Merit and efficiency will be destroyed if caste-based reservation is implemented. This is an argument advanced by the opponents of the reservation policy in India. In the Indian context, merit refers to 'certification of competence, aptitude and knowledge acquired through an examination of some kind' (Deshpande 2006: 2440). It places more emphasis on individual abilities. Mostly, merit in India is decided on the basis of examinations. In order to achieve the culturally defined merit, one needs to have access to different forms of resources like socio-economic and cultural resources (Galenter 1984).

Merit is an institutional form of cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu (Quoted in Nash 1990). Merit as a cultural capital could be acquired in a specific cultural setting. According to Bourdieu, students with upper and middle class backgrounds can appropriate this cultural capital more easily than other students. It is monopolised by certain communities and groups. This unequal distribution of cultural capital creates different forms of inequalities in society. In the Indian context, merit has been monopolised by upper and middle strata of upper castes. With the acquisition of merit, they are dominating in higher education and public employments (Nash 1990).

The proponents of the reservation policy deconstruct the notion of merit itself. According to them, merit is 'a culturally and ideologically specific products' to legitimise the domi-

nation of upper castes over others (Rai 2002: 4315). Deshpande (2006:2440) subscribing to the same idea, points out that 'the notion of merit bears the heavy ideological burden of legitimising a system explicitly based on exclusion by discrimination'. There is no objective and standard criteria of knowledge. This implies that there is no objective merit in reality. In this way, they denounced the application of merit in determining one's knowledge and excluding deprived sections from higher education and high-profile public employments.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both the quantitative and qualitative methods of the data collection and analysis. As this study involves large number of university students, the survey research method was employed. 450 students were selected in proportion to their total number of students in each reservation category at UoH. Out of these 450, the category of students includes: ST- 60; SC- 85; OBC- 143; and General- 162. Thus, the stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the sample students. The same sampling technique was used to identify students from different programme of studies- Integrated Masters Programme, PG, MPhil, and PhD.

A detailed questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used to collect quantitative data from the 450 students. To supplement this quantitative data, some qualitative data was collected from 20 selected students. Out of these, 10 are men and 10 women. A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify these 20 students. Another separate questionnaire with open-ended questions was distributed among these 20 to elicit their general opinion and gender perspective on the reservation policy. For data analysis, the quantitative data on students' responses were converted into percentages. The qualitative data were used to support the results of quantitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The university should promote different forms of pluralism⁶ within the campus like students and faculties from different social backgrounds, different forms of disciplines and approaches (Guha 2007). Maintaining this plural-

istic can foster plurality of opinions and perspectives on different social issues based on critical reasoning. Three forms of opinion on the reservation policy have emerged among students: 1) Reservation should be promoted to secure social justice and equality of progress; 2) Reservation is completely against the ideals of equality and secularism and is divisive and anti- progressive, thus, it should be abolished; and 3) Reservation should not be based on any criteria like caste, class, gender or religion. It should be provided only to the deserved poor and needy. The following data analysis would explain the perception of students from UoH on the reservation policy in India.

Students' Reflections on Caste/ Tribe-based Reservation

Caste, class and tribe are some of the criteria used in group-based reservation in India. From Table 1, around 62 per cent of the respondents are not supporting caste/tribe-based reservation. They are of the opinion that the caste reservation tends to promote the caste consciousness and caste identity among individuals and it would act as a divisive force on caste basis. However, 38 % of students have supported the group reservation based on caste/tribe. It does not necessarily mean that those who support reservation have more caste consciousness. There is a weak relationship between the degree of caste consciousness and supporting reservation. Those who support reservation hail from different social, economic, religious and regional backgrounds. They are not necessarily from similar caste backgrounds. They look at caste/tribe as a criterion that signifies the relative social backwardness of the group.

Table 1: Category-wise response to reservation based on caste/tribe

Category	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
ST	33	55	27	45	60	13
SC	31	36	54	64	85	19
OBC	92	64	51	36	143	32
GEN	122	75	40	25	162	36
Total	278	62	172	38	450	100

From Table 1, it can be inferred that general (75%) and OBC (64%) category students are relatively not supporting caste/tribe based reservation. Mostly the upper caste general category

ry and upper strata of OBC students are against the caste reservation whereas students of SC (64%) and ST (45%) categories are supporting it. Therefore, it is true that social and cultural backgrounds of students are still influencing their perception on the question of reservation.

Some of those who oppose the identity-based reservation still support the policy of reservation only to the poorest individuals and deserved people who do not fall under any criterion. This means that they seek to apply economic criteria for reservation. For instance, I.P. Desai, an Indian sociologist, is in favour of class-based reservation, opposing the caste reservation. The logic is that caste-based reservation eliminates the lower strata of upper castes from the benefits. Some of the liberal upper caste students from the general category take this position, though most of the other upper caste and upper class students are less supportive of any form of criterion-based reservation. As we have already mentioned, the lower strata of upper caste people will have more advantages over lower caste people in view of their acquired social and cultural resources that will give them an extra edge.

Reservation Based on Gender

Women in India are seen as a weaker section of the society, considering the age-old tradition and other social and cultural practices that have inflicted injustice on them for centuries. They are provided reservation only in local panchayats and municipalities⁷. Although there is a growing demand for reservation for women in the parliament and state legislatures, the women's reservation bill could not be passed in the parliament on various occasions. This implies that the rigid patriarchal system, caste and religious norms prevent women from political participation. Despite this fact, some progressive states and higher education institutions have provided some sort of reservation for women.

The university as a public institution needs to be sensitive to gender issues and promote gender equality. The preferential treatment for women in education and public employment is an attempt to promote their social position and privilege in the society. The deep-rooted gender inequalities, however, have been visible even among the university students who have been socialised in the patriarchal cultural settings.

Table 2: Category-wise response to reservation based on gender

Category	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
ST	38	63	22	37	60	13
SC	43	51	42	49	85	19
OBC	91	64	52	36	143	32
GEN	120	74	42	26	162	36
Total	291	65	159	35	450	100

Table 2 indicates the opinion of students from different categories on gender-based reservation. Here, around 74% of general and 64% of OBC category students have not agreed to gender-based reservation. 51% of SC students are not supporting this. The data shows that gender-biased notions are relatively more among general and OBC students, whereas it is comparatively less among SC category students. Caste rigidity in the case of women, thus, is higher among upper castes whereas it is less among lower caste people. Gender equality through reservation is obscured and denied to women in the name of securing formal equality and secular principles in support of anti-reservation policies. Broadly, gender-biased notions are still more prevalent among general category students and comparatively less among SC category students in the university.

Religion-based Reservation

So far religion has not been recognised by the Supreme Court as a criterion for reservation though some efforts were made by the central government. In this direction, Muslims in India are considered as a socially and educationally backward community. Different committees and reports, including the recent Sachar Commission report (2006), have confirmed this point. The central government sought to provide a sub-quota of 4.5 per cent reservation for backward Muslims within the 27 per cent OBC quota. The Supreme Court, however, declined to approve this, citing that it is unconstitutional and leads to religion-based discrimination.

Table 3: Gender-wise response to reservation based on religion

Gender	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
Men	223	79	60	21	283	63
Women	130	78	37	22	167	37
Total	353	78	97	22	450	100

Table 3 explains the students' opinion on the religion-based reservation. Students are strongly opposed to religion-based reservation. Both men and women students are equally not supporting of religion-based reservation. This is clearly visible from the Table that about 78 % students are against this while both men (79%) and women (78%) students are equally not supporting.

A qualitative study was carried out to understand the reflections of boys and girls students on the reservation policy. From the data analysis, it is interesting to note that most of the boys are in favour of all forms of the reservation whereas most of the girls are not in favour of any form of reservation. This point can be well supported from the following responses of students on the question of gender-based reservation.

A male student of MA English literature says:

"Reservation is important for the upliftment of the disprivileged people, considering their historical subjugation, discrimination and backwardness. I support reservation for disadvantaged group which may be based on a caste, religion, region, etc."

A woman student of MA sociology programme mentioned:

"I do not support any form of reservation. We need to maintain equality, merit and competency in the society. Caste and region based reservation will divide the society and it will affect the merit system."

Another woman student of the MA programme highlighted:

"In the caste and religion-based reservations, only the upper strata of lower castes and of religious group will benefit more, leaving behind the lower strata of upper castes, lower castes and religious groups. Therefore, reservation should be provided only to the needy and deserved people. It should not be based on any criteria like caste, religion, region, etc."

Social Category and Religion-based Reservation

Table 4: Category-wise response to reservation based on religion

Category	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
ST	44	73	16	27	60	13
SC	59	69	26	31	85	19
OBC	114	80	29	20	143	32
GEN	137	85	25	15	162	36
Total	354	79	96	21	450	100

Table 4 clearly shows that 80 % of general and 85% of OBC students are not supporting religion-based reservation. Even SC (69%) and ST (73%) students also do not express much support for the religion-based reservation. It is again the identity of individuals as a particular religious category that occupies a crucial role in influencing their choices on reservation policy. Even those who support reservation based on other criteria are not ready to accept the religion-based inner reservation for Muslim minorities within the OBC quota of 27% reservation, as they mostly hail from a similar Hindu social group when it comes to the question of reservation for religious minorities.

The dominant Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu, for instance, staged demonstrations and protests against the introduction of inner-reservation within the SC quota for the Arunthathiyar Dalit community, a marginalised group among the SCs in the state. Similarly, the university students also attach relatively more importance to their community identity and select their choices on reservation policy accordingly. Their choices are selected in such a way that it will favour their social group more.

Students' Responses on Reservation based on Disability

Table 5: Gender-wise response to reservation based on disability

Gender	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
Men	91	32	192	68	283	63
Women	55	33	112	67	167	37
Total	146	32	304	68	450	100

As per the Table 5, about 68 per cent of students are in favour of reservation based on physical disability while only 20 percent of them are less agreeing to this. Among male students, about 68% have agreed to reservation in terms of physical disability, and the agreement is 67% among women students. Thus, it is apparent that different social identities like caste, religion and gender are not considered much when it comes to the question of friendliness towards disabled students and special reservation for them.

Again, this could be clearly drawn from the Table 6 that with regard to reservation for disabled students, around 68 per cent of students,

irrespective of their categories, have agreed to this form of reservation, and only 32 per cent of them are not supporting this. Thus, it is clear that on the one hand, students are ready to accept disability as a special case, while considering reservation for them. On the other hand, they are not considering many other identities like caste, class, gender and religion for implementing reservation policy.

Table 6: Category-wise response to reservation based on disability

Category	No	%	Yes	%	Total	%
ST	22	37	38	63	60	13
SC	21	25	64	75	85	19
OBC	42	29	101	71	143	32
GEN	61	38	101	62	162	36
Total	146	32	304	68	450	100

In the case of reservation for differently-abled persons, most of the students, irrespective of their gender, caste and religious backgrounds, have replied positively. They accept them as deserved people who are eligible for reservation. A woman student doing MA in sociology has replied:

"I empathise with the disabled persons. Reservation is necessary to improve their backwardness and capabilities".

Another male student of MA English Literature says:

"I completely support reservation for disabled students. The bodily disability prevents them from accessing different supportive sources for successful education. Social justice should be given by providing special reservation for them." The university students, thus, look at the reservation for disabled persons beyond their identities with the particular category like caste, religion and class.

From the foregoing, it is very clear that the women students are in support of formal equality while men students are in favour of proportional equality. It is interesting to highlight that women students are even not ready to accept the gender reservation as well. The reason is that most of the woman students are from the upper strata of upper and lower castes and class backgrounds. The university accommodates more girls from elite caste and class backgrounds. That's why, most of the women students reflect the views of the upper strata of society which is against the reservation policy. Most of the boys

are first-generation students from middle and lower caste and class backgrounds. Boys, hence, are supporting the reservation policy.

It is always interesting to look at the major findings of the study as we could find certain similarities in some cases with regard to the opinion on the reservation. Generally, gender-based reservation is not largely supported by the university students. More pointedly, almost half of the female students are in opposition to gender-based reservation. Given this, it is clear that university students are not more progressive towards gender equality as they still hold the traditional value system that is more in favour of gender based discriminatory practices.

Broadly, more than two-thirds of students irrespective of their caste and religious background have disagreed to religion-based reservation. It draws our attention to the fact that university students are relatively secular when it comes to the question of religion-based reservation. It does not mean to say that students are more secular to other cultural practices associated with religion. This point could be explicated from the fact that there are still some ideological clashes and physical violence relating to serving beef at university mess and within the campus. This is because some group of students from particular religious and caste backgrounds are opposed to this, considering that it would hurt their religious sentiments and question their caste superiority and dominant position at the campus. Thus, we may conclude that the secularisation of cultural practices has not materialised in reality on the campus, though this is actualised in the case of religion-based reservation.

To the question of caste-based reservation, it is the general and OBC category students who are less agreed while SC and ST students are comparatively more agreed to this. Generally, 50-55 per cent of students have not supported caste-based reservation. From this, it may seem that caste identity and consciousness are relatively less among university students. If we investigate closely, it is apparent that General and OBC category students are more or less, if not completely, from upper and dominant castes. These students, on the one hand, strive to maintain their caste superiority and dominant status by opposing protective reservation to disprivileged students. SC and ST students in supporting caste-based reservation, on the other hand,

fight for their own right enshrined in the constitution by mobilising themselves based on caste identity. Caste identity, therefore, is still prevalent at the campus despite opposition to caste-based reservation due to the fact that this opposition itself is to maintain the superior position of their caste identity.

More interestingly, despite disagreement to reservation on the basis of caste, religion and other factors, more than two-thirds of students are in support of reservation for disabled students. Here, it should be noted that disability is cutting across any caste, class, religion, region or gender. It cannot be restricted to any particular form of identity which may have opposition from other groups which are in conflict with it. Therefore, university students are friendlier to disabled students.

CONCLUSION

In the Indian context, the notion of anti-reservation has been associated with many stigmatised categories like killing of merits, promoting inequality, lack of competence and inefficiency. This was very much popularised by the proponents of anti-reservation, especially upper caste and upper class, upper-middle class people. By applying these negative categories of stigma to the lower caste and lower class students who avail reservation in education and employment, they are trying to manufacture a public opinion against the reservation policy. The students availing reservation are referred as the ones who lack merit, competence and efficiency. To avoid those stigmas, the upper class students from SC and ST categories do not want to be identified themselves with the reservation policies and they will oppose the reservation policy to escape from the socially constructed categories of stigma. On the other hand, they will make use of the reservation policies in order to improve their social and economic status.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These socially constructed stigmas, would establish the popular notion that reservation means killing of merits and competence. But, the real meanings and objectives of the reservation will be overshadowed under the guise of the constructed popular notion. Thus, there is an urgent need to reconceptualise the reservation

policy. Reservation is not a charity, but is a constitutional right of deprived people to participate in the national development. It should be reconceptualised as Rationalisation of Resource Sharing⁶ (RRR).

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NOTES

- 1 This discourse had developed in the 1960s when the western democratic societies agreed to the principle of cultural differences in the place of homogeneity. During the initial phase of formation of democratic countries, the emphasis had been given to the principle of homogeneity, giving primacy to the idea of equality and citizenship theory that did not provide recognition to prevailing cultural differences among different communities and groups. Later, the notion of multiculturalism was accepted in principle by the liberal scholars within the liberal democratic tradition (Visvanathan 2000: 3660).
- 2 According to Article 340 of the Indian constitution, the president may appoint a commission to inquire into the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes (Basu 2011). Therefore, the second backward class commission under the chairmanship of B.P. Mandal, an Indian Parliamentarian, was set up in 1978 by Morarji Desai to identify socially and educationally backward classes and to recommend the provisions for reservation and quotas for them. This commission identified 3743 castes and communities in India as backward by employing eleven social, economic and educational criteria and recommended 27 per cent reservation in government services and higher educational institutions.
- 3 They were the native Indian states which were directly ruled by native princes or local rulers during the British Raj in India. Though there were not directly governed by the British rulers, they had been subjected to indirect control of the British officials. During the time of India's independence, there were 545 princely states that were abolished after the independence and integrated into the India state (Henige 2004).
- 4 This was one of the electoral procedures followed during the British Raj in India. According to this procedure, only Muslims were allowed to select their representatives in the election. The intention of the policy was to divide the Hindus and Muslims on communal line.

- 5 See www.youthforquality.com for further information on anti- reservation debates.
- 6 Pluralism is 'a political programme and ...is a manifestation of what we wish India to be'. It is different from the concept of diversity which denotes a particular social condition in which different groups and communities live together (Guha 2007).
- 7 Panchayats and municipalities are local governing bodies in India consisting of local representatives directly elected by the people. Panchayats are rural level local bodies that may consist of a village or group of villages. Municipalities are urban local bodies consisting of towns and metropolitan cities.
- 8 A concept developed by Nagaraju Gundemeda as part of the compulsory course on Sociology of India offered to the first year M. A Sociology students. He argues that the reservation policy, either pro or anti, suffer from the stigma and group labelling. He argues for replacing the policy of reservation with RRR which enables the ideological empowerment of the marginal groups of the Indian society.

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