

Editorial

QUO VADIS (WHITHER GOEST THOU) ?

*I see justice weeping silently and furtively
at the hopeless vices of power misused.
I see youths with maddening zeal
dashing their heads against the rock wall in deep agony
but in vain.
My voice is choked today, no music in my flute,
prison of black moonless night has
vanquished my world in the depth of nightmare.*

These are the lines taken from a poem – *Prashna (Question)* - by Rabindranath Tagore. This poem had a direct bearing upon India's freedom struggle in 1930s that witnessed loss of countless young men who had scintillation in their eyes. It was published in a collection named *Parishesh (the End)* in the year 1932 and around the same time Mahatma Gandhi was fighting against the cruel social, economic and cultural ostracism of a large section of society, the untouchables.

In 1950, the writers of the Constitution of Independent India adopted a policy of reserving positions in the central and state government funded institutions for the marginalized communities recognized as the *scheduled castes* and *scheduled tribes*. The idea was to pull them into the mainstream within a definitive time period. Since then, the reservation quota at 22.5% has been renewed every ten years. In 1980, the Mandal Commission identified 3,743 castes and sub-castes principally in artisan-peasant communities as the *other backward classes*. In 1990, based on Mandal Commission report, a further 27% of government jobs were reserved for the *other backward classes*.

The government has now come up with twofold agenda. On the one hand, it wants to extend the original 22.5% reservation quota for the *scheduled castes* and *scheduled tribes* to the private sector. On the other hand, it wants to introduce 27% reservation quota for the *other backward classes* on top of the present 22.5% reservation quota for the *scheduled castes* and *scheduled tribes* in centrally regulated higher centres of study and federally funded universities. The government has recently announced that the additional 27% reservation quota shall be implemented from June 2007. To this effect, the 104th Constitution Amendment Bill will possibly be introduced in the Monsoon Session of the current year. It is being expected that such expansion of the scope of the Indian Constitution to backward communities combined with promised economic growth of India shall result in a greater benefit to India as a nation.

The nation has however witnessed a countrywide fervent uproar against the new reservation issue. A section of the present generation youth has demanded that the government should undertake a review on the fall out of reservation in different sections of life and walk after fifty years of its implementation before any new reservation quota policy is introduced. Several individuals of high standing and institutions including the National Human Right Commission have seconded this demand. Most political parties however have supported the proposed Constitutional Amendment with an idea that this shall promote the uplifting of the backward classes. Nevertheless, in view of the growing unrest, the central government is considering a solution to protect the interests of all sections of students, and that is to expand greatly the number of seats in all major institutes so that a balance is maintained. However, questions remain: Will it result in nation's overall growth keeping healthy intra- and inter-classes integration? Or, will it result in wasting of whatever present-day integrity we have at the constitutional level? We actually need a scientific outlook to and bona fide implementation of policies that will ensure holistic growth and development, not hasty, short-term, arbitrary attempts.

There lies the worry. Sadly enough there is very little tolerant view to the opinion of dissent. Sadly enough there is very little conscious and serious attempt to employ free mind with holistic intend,

educated skepticism and philosophical tolerance. Sadly enough there is very little constructive process towards social debate. Sadly enough there is no scientific and honest attempt to improve nation's health and education – the most effective tools of ground leveler. Sadly enough there is generally no operative recognition of other significant social separators, namely economy and gender, in the policies.

It is also worrisome that the industrialists and managers of private sectors, who are suggesting quite strongly against the notion of reservation, historically played only dismal role in uplifting the backward classes in Independent India. On the contrary, they have been milking the national resource wantonly. In last sixty years, we have no example that may even nominally match the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Wellcome Trust and similar institutions abroad.

It is always debatable whether a social policy alone can banish a prejudice. It is however rarely debated that the aim of a healthy prosperous state is to give chances to every individual to become a good citizen so that she or he can take up the necessary recourse to fight prejudices that shun the growth and development of the community and thereby help the nation in attaining her best potentials. We can only pray that good and ethical practices at all levels of social polity will soon allow India to become a strong and happy nation.