

# Open competition based on merit

By M. J. Audi

Reservations and Open Competition based on Merit are two sides of the same coin. Strangely one side is analysed in depth and other is taken for granted. For proper perspective of the situation in India, nothing should be taken for granted or nothing should be accepted at its face value.

## Vote bank

The Founding Fathers considered reservations as a means to strike the level between weaker and stronger sections in the Indian society within a precise time frame of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution. However, the powers that be shrewdly saw in that generous gesture an opportunity to perpetuate themselves in power. The weaker sections became dependable and valuable "Vote bank". No wonder, every Government at the Centre, regardless of party label and so-called ideology, renews reservations after every ten years. From 1950 to August 1990, 22½ per cent jobs were reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and 77½ per cent for Open Competition which was euphemism for connections with centre of affluence and influence. Thus all reservations and no competition became the unwritten law for the highest paid jobs in India. In a country of 80 crores, 80 per cent of the highest paid jobs are exclusively reserved only to the persons that belong to or are very close to the centres of affluence and influence. They come from the families and favourites of the top in politics, trade and various services of State. If a few persons belonging to the poorer strata of society get them, it is not because of the system but in spite of the system.

It has been well said that every action has a reaction equal and opposite. Reservations recommended by the Mandal Commission are nothing but a reaction to the wicked Open Competition that prevails in India which is neither open nor a competition. It is a plain

plunder by persons patronised by centres of affluence and influence. Interestingly, these persons belong to all castes and outcastes as well as all religions that exist in India. Hence, it is patently unjust to condemn the reservations without condemning the prevailing pattern of competition.

Extension of reservations has deeply disturbed the beneficiaries of wicked open competition. This is indeed a matter of great surprise. Hitherto, they had successfully deceived people of India in the name of open competition based on merit. They had masterfully defeated the policy of reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. So far in nine out of ten cases, they finalised the selections on the dining tables in expensive hotels and formalised them through the selection committees packed with yes-men and women. They manipulated the legal system to give legitimacy and protection to such devious selections. The posts reserved for the S.C. and S.T. were systematically denied to them. They were not called for interviews because the screening committees suppressed their applications. On the pretext of non-availability of S.C. and S.T. candidates, the favourites were appointed. The posts were re-advertised twice only to confirm the favourites in their posts. Perhaps, now they think that if the people of India become conscious of this subtle exploitation, it would be the beginning of the end of their privileges, perquisites and parasitic life style.

## Reservations

That large-scale reservations will introduce mediocrity in the Government Services and Public Sector Undertakings is sheer nonsense. That Private Sector Recruitment is presently based upon merit is nonsense upon the stilts. People of India should know that despite forty years of Swaraj, we have neither objective and rational criteria to determine merit nor means to verify and con-

firm merit. In 1987, at the 74th Science Congress, the then Prime Minister of India lamented that "mediocrity, bureaucracy and vested interests" dominate our science. The domination, in fact, extends to entire academic arena. Ironically, the educationists whom society considers as the guardians of merit are its worst enemies. Merit, today, is a matter of opinion and the fiat of authorities sets the seal. What are its consequences? Our scholars are, perforce, obliged to form mutual admiration societies where ducks are passing for swans and American diamonds are praised as the Kohinoors. The scholars have become pedlars of patronage and beggars of positions.

Therefore, to talk of merit in India today is as laughable and as ludicrous as talking of the governance of the United States of America by the Red Indians. Fact of matter is that the IQ of persons holding the highest paid jobs in the Governments, private sector and public sector in India is not all different from those who are denied the highest paid jobs. The difference lies in the opportunities for sophistication which are at present completely grabbed by the centres of affluence and influence and which are beyond the reach of others.

Paid pipers propagate that Private Sector alone is the guardian of efficiency and merit in India. What do the facts tell? Efficiency and merit are not at all seen in the quality of the goods produced or services rendered to the society. Goods once sold will not be taken back is an epigram for everything from cars to carrots. Rise of consumer protection movement is an epitaph for the quality of goods produced in private and public sectors. As regards the services to society -- students declared failed get first class after reevaluation of their papers; more than ten years pass between filing the case and delivery of judgment; bridges collapse as soon as they are

(Contd. in Col. 7 & 8)

# Open competition basis on merit

(Contd. from Col. 5)

constructed; operations are successful but patients are dead; Public funds go to private pockets despite laborious accounting and meticulous auditing; A wide network of intelligence services exists in every nook and corner of India but the names of smugglers cannot be known; collection of huge subsidies on fraudulent projects, evasion of Custom and Excise duties and evasion of Income Tax have become industries. The efficiency and merit are fully seen in malpractices, manipulations, misappropriations and regularisation of irregularities. Incidentally, the largest number of persons nabbed for holding wealth disproportionate to their known sources of income belong to this efficient and meritorious tribe.

## Blessings

Without emancipation from economic bondage, the people of India will never enjoy real blessings of Swaraj. When Mr. Devi Lal posed as the champion of farmers, our intellectuals harped on urban-rural divide. Reality tells that only one divide exists everywhere in the world - haves and have-nots. In India have-nots constitute 95 per cent of population. No political theorisation, no economic rationalisation, no legal quibblings and no statistical juggleries can suppress brutal and cruel exploitation of the hapless and silent majority.

Dr. Ambedkar grasped the importance of economic factor. He said "there was complete absence of two things in Indian society; equality in social life and equality in economic life. On January 26, 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality." In the Constituent Assembly, none was better qualified and more competent than Dr. Ambedkar to insist upon economic equality in India. Unfortunately, Dr. Ambedkar was found wanting. He allowed himself to be

lost in the rhetoric of rights. The scheme of Fundamental Rights devised by Dr. Ambedkar has not all worked to the advantage of the underdogs of Indian society. Only the top dogs have prospered and are prospering under it. The working of the constitution has not at all abolished "inequalities". After four decades, "democracy in India", as Dr. Ambedkar stated, "is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil".

What hope could warm the hearts of dumb and semi-starved and half-naked millions? Lasting solution lies in the immediate abolition of the Reservations of every kind and abolition of prevailing farce of Open Competition based on Merit. Without economic justice, social justice is an outright mockery. All social conflicts have their roots in income disparities. Hence, instead of beating about the bushes, the central Government should at once go to the heart of the problem. Every person in India should be guaranteed right to work linked with decent living wage. Decent living wage means exactly same standard of living enjoyed at present by the members belonging to the centres of affluence and influence. people of India should assert that whether they are the rulers or the ruled, whether they hold high or low posts in the hierarchies, they are all workers first, and workers last. Secondly, people should compel their Governments to frame objective and rational criteria, to determine Merit and apply them regardless of parentage and patronage. In every sector and at every level, competition should be truly fair, free and open with a provision for public verification and confirmation of the Merit of the selected. In case of merit, the most important thing is not the selection but its public verification and confirmation after the selection. Without decent Living Wage and Objective and Rational Criteria to determine merit, neither people of India nor this great country has any future.