

‘If US can have quotas, why not India?’

NCP leader and Maharashtra PWD minister Chhagan Bhujbal says Sam Pitroda and Dr Mohammed Rela do not understand concept of social justice

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Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad, an apolitical body of other backward classes (OBCs) floated by Bhujbal and which also doubles as a political pressure group for him, recently held a pro quota morcha. The event has put the firebrand NCP leader on the state’s political centre-stage.

Being in NCP, a party dominated by Maratha leaders, it is not an easy task for Bhujbal to espouse the cause of OBCs. “When I raise my voice to support reservations I know there are difficulties,” he admits. But he strongly backs Union HRD Minister Arjun Singh’s move to introduce quotas in institutions of higher learnings.

Here are excerpts from an interview with Bhujbal:

Do OBCs need reservations now?

Why not? The OBCs comprise nearly 54 per cent of the country’s population. If they are deprived of opportunities can the country progress? If US, the most developed nation, follows the policy of reservation, why not India, where the underprivileged have been denied their rights for ages. And OBC is not a caste, it is a class. How long will the backward class be deprived of its rights? Even after the quota, just six per cent of the OBCs will get an opportunity.

Is the controversy of reservations being raked up for political mileage?

What has politics to do with the issue? If nearly 75 per cent of the country’s population is being denied its rights, will we attain progress? When the quota bill was cleared by the Parliament not a single party opposed it.

What about the stir by medicos...

They (striking doctors) are coming in the way of social justice. These students are educated but not cultured. Why is it that people from other spheres like engineering and Information Technology are not joining the stir? It is because doctors can hold authorities to ransom as their strike could result in loss of life. At whose and what cost are these doctors agitating?

But even National Knowledge Commission head Sam Pitroda and renowned liver-transplant surgeon Dr Mohammed Rela have opposed the extension of reservation policy?

Every individual has got his own vision. Both Pitroda and Dr Rela lack the understanding of ground reality. Are they aware about the situation of the underprivileged across the villages in India? They have settled abroad and are doing well but they don't understand the concept of social justice.

But will reservations affect merit and efficiency?

America is one of the most developed nations and is known for its capitalism. If reservations have not adversely affected the US why should they affect India?

Is the NCP supporting you over the issue of reservation?

Absolutely. The Congress-NCP supports reservations fully. In fact, the state government has recently passed an ordinance to ensure reservations in educational institutions. The NCP leadership is sensitive to the issue and it stands for the cause.

Then why were NCP members not part of the morcha held by Samata Parishad on Tuesday in Mumbai?

The morcha call was given by Samata Parishad. We, as an organisation, have been taking up the issue of reservations since the body was incepted in 1992. NCP as a political party has not taken part in the agitation.

What is your view on President A P J Abdul Kalam's suggestion that seats in institutions of higher learning should be increased?

Let them increase the seats. We want our quota. Our approach is positive. We are not against anyone. But we should not be denied opportunities.

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