

‘Institutes like IITs and IIMs should be closed down’

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Mandal is back. With the news that a crore a year has just become slightly less dear for the B-school grad, came the rider that it may soon become that much more difficult for a general category student to make it to IIMs, IITs or central universities.

The government is considering a proposal to reserve 27 per cent seats there for those applying under the OBC quota. There has been an instant uproar in the corporate sector and the student community. Most are sniffing political opportunism in the move.

But there is another side to the debate. In an exclusive interview to DNA, author of Why I am not a Hindu? and one of the country's foremost Dalit intellectuals Kancha Ilaiah tells Daipayan Halder this was long overdue.

The Election Commission has, on Saturday, sought an explanation from HRD Minister Arjun Singh over the Centre's proposal to reserve seats for OBCs in IITs, IIMs and all central universities, saying he has violated the model code of conduct before the Assembly polls. Do you see this as yet another instance of populism that has run riot?

Well, it is true that after L K Advani decided to go on yet another Bharat Yatra and that too before the assembly polls, the Congress needed a game plan to counter it. Hence, they decided to push for reservation. But there is nothing wrong, per se, in declaring a policy decision. The Constitution has already been amended for the purpose. Elections in the five states are a separate issue and should not be affected by a proposal that is yet to be implemented. The opposition to the proposal only exposes the casteist and racist mindset of those who are opposing it. Even the EC is not free from the malaise. Today or tomorrow, the government had to introduce reservation because that is what the Constitution says.

The IITs and IIMs are successful brands and have gained international recognition. If Mandal replaces merit, wouldn't their brand equity suffer?

We should close down the IITs and the IIMs as they pander to the upper-caste economy of the country. Those who pass out from these institutes use their technical and managerial skills to earn dollars abroad. Are they using their skill sets to the benefit of the agro-based economy of the country? Tell me, with rising incomes of our B-school graduates are farmer suicide rates coming down? So what is the use of such education if it cannot be put to any use within the country or for the uplift of the majority of the population who live in villages?

But can this not lead to reverse discrimination? There is a lot of resentment for the quota candidates for what is often perceived as an unfair advantage that they have over others?

In the book, *The Shape of the River*, William (G) Bowen and Derek (Curtis) Bok argue for more racial diversity in the US' student population. Today, because of affirmative action in the US, the entry of coloured people in the education, employment and political systems are being increasingly ensured and has benefited their society. There is no reverse discrimination there. In India, on the other hand, there is no democratic space for the SC, ST and OBCs. This move was long overdue.

But even the US policymakers are not in support of reservation. Can there not be any other form of affirmative action than caste-based reservations in jobs and educational institutions?

Reservation is absolutely essential. But there should also be other forms of affirmative action. Successive governments have failed to implement the constitutional promise of introducing free and compulsory education after independence. There should be mass English language primary schools for Dalits. There should also be reservation in the private sector. We will soon take to the streets to ensure that.

Finally, would the move benefit the OBC students themselves? There are examples galore of quota students dropping out of such schools of excellence as they cannot cope up with the pressure.

This is incorrect. When you say backward caste students are not good enough, you display a casteist bias. When I was the head of the political science department of Osmania University, a Dalit student had secured the highest marks.

Backward caste students are generally discriminated against in these premier institutes. Instead of providing them a leg-up, they are made to feel unwanted. Given a favourable condition and a fair chance, they can do as well as the others.

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