

Are SCs, STs and OBCs less talented?

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Often I notice people degrading, sometimes publicly, the SCs, STs, and OBCs as inefficient at their workplaces. Be it an SC doctor or an SC professor or even an SC student, the person in question is not an individual human being but a 'reserved category candidate', and hence promptly to be dismissed as weak, inferior, and incapable. The question which bothers me is: *are SCs, STs and OBCs less talented?* Ordinary people, who are not really 'caste conscious', have always found many doctors, professors, and students – irrespective of which caste they belong to – to be incapable. That is to say, we can find students/doctors/professors belonging to the so-called 'general' category, who are quite insincere, unethical, and inefficient. I know of a 'general' doctor who asked his lady patient to call him up in the night to report her health, and instead of talking medical matters he started flirting with her to the extent that she had to take recourse to another doctor. I know of 'general' professors who have wasted the students' time in class by talking irrelevant things or teaching nothing, or casually absenting themselves from class. I know of 'general' students who have been insincere to the extreme and have failed to prove themselves.

Can I generalize, on the above ground, that everybody belonging to the 'general' category is incapable? If I do so, you would call it absurd. Just because a few people are insincere and incapable, does not mean everybody belonging to the general category is incapable. But, my dear friend, why don't you use the same logic when it comes to judging people belonging to the lower castes? Just because a few SC candidates are apparently inefficient cannot exclude the possibility that many others belonging to the lower castes might be highly capable. You know what? When it comes to judging a Brahmin guy, you point out his personal flaws and don't say that he is bad because he is Brahmin. But when it comes to assessing a candidate who is accidentally born in a lower caste, you do not consider him as an individual with personal flaws. You end up blaming, wittingly or unwittingly, the entire community of people to which he belongs. Remember,

to debase an entire community of people is to commit violence against humanity. And history will not forgive you for that.

Not all lower caste candidates are incapable. There are many who are more capable than any general category candidate. Think of B R Ambedkar, whom I am sure many of you never cared, or shall I say, never dared, to read. You guys would read Marx, Freud, and Derrida, and you would pose as intellectuals. You guys would fight in the name of Che Guevara and pose as revolutionaries. But you won't read Ambedkar. Let me tell you, if there has ever been any original thinker in India, it is Ambedkar. If any thinker has genuinely cared for the downtrodden men and women of India, it is Ambedkar. If you have not read Ambedkar you should be ashamed of yourself. I am sure, the preceding statements of mine would be ridiculed by some as 'arrogant' and 'misleading'. People who would pour such ridicule are people who are extremely prejudiced. They are being requested to read Ambedkar's works and get back to me.

Now to get back to the question I am grappling with. Is an SC candidate inefficient because he was born in a lower caste? Any logical thinking would prompt an answer in the negative. What then could be the cause of such a candidate's inefficiency? One might say the cause of inefficiency would differ from case to case. That would be an irresponsible answer. I think one major reason why the lower caste candidates sometimes end up as 'inefficient' is that they do not receive the proper guidance, or the extra guidance, that they need. Now don't counter this statement by saying that there are many general candidates who too do not receive proper guidance. Read on what I am saying. Who would be responsible for the proper guidance of a student? Parents and teachers, of course! Now see what happens with the SC/ST candidates. In majority of cases such students are the first generation learners. That is to say, their parents did not go to colleges and universities, and left their schools at an early age to work for their families. Their parents might allow them to study but would ask for their getting a quick job and earning money for the family. Such parents have never known how one becomes doctors or professors or engineers. The ancestors of such parents have never been allowed to receive education. Such parents are incapable to guide their aspiring children.

Now let us turn to the teachers. I think teachers can, and teachers should, play an important role in the proper development of the lower caste students. I myself have witnessed, time and again, how teachers at different institutions have failed in this task. Often the teachers would complain that this or that student does not understand what is being taught, or that he gives vacant look in class, or that he cannot write a single sentence in correct English. I have seen how such students are, in majority of cases, lower caste candidates. I would ask these teachers: Have you yourself done anything to help the student improve himself? If a student cannot connect with what is being taught in class or writes a bad assignment, have you inquired why the student was inefficient? I have seen how the lower caste students feel ostracized in class, and feel afraid to approach the teachers because they, the students, think they won't be able to properly communicate, and hence would be ridiculed. Have the teachers taken special care for such students? Have the teachers talked to, and cared to listen to, such students? I am sorry, they haven't.

If a lower caste student is found inefficient it is neither because he is less talented nor always because he has been insincere. It is because neither in his childhood nor in his student life did he receive proper training. That he has got a chance to study at an academic institution or that he has got a government job may be due to the reservation. But that he is inefficient is because he has always been deprived of the proper academic environment and proper training.

Now the question is: should the SCs, STs, and OBCs stop studying, and stop applying for government jobs? That is, should they go back to cultivate lands, because some pundits consider them inefficient? Or, should they be helped to overcome the obstacles in the way of their development? I think this issue can be resolved by awakening what I have called 'caste consciousness' or an awareness of how historically the lower caste people have been systematically exploited and deprived of education and the means of self-preservation. The students who belong to the lower caste should from the beginning be conscious of the fact that they belong to the lower caste, that in the name of 'reservation' they have been offered an opportunity to develop themselves, or prove their potential. On the other hand, the teachers should also be 'caste conscious', that is, they should understand that in every batch of students there are some who have no academic background, who sometimes have no clue what is being taught in class, and who need extra care.

One should first understand that 'reservation' is a misnomer, and that 'representation' is the right word. That is to say, such 'lower caste' students are 'reserved category' students neither because they are economically weak (in majority of cases they are weak) nor because they are enjoying a 'privilege', but because they represent a community that has, for more than three thousand years, been deprived of education. The teachers should help the students not to feel ashamed because they belong to the lower castes or not to hide their caste identity. The teachers should tell the students that our birth is not in our hands and that one is not known by one's birth but rather by one's work. The teachers should train and inspire the students properly to develop efficiency in their respective fields.

The problem, however, is that most people do not have any clear idea about the 'what and why' of 'reservation'. Dear friends, do a little bit of research; and yes, read Ambedkar! Time is ripe to keep aside caste prejudice and to awaken a positive kind of caste consciousness.

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