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EDITORIAL

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breeds inefficiency and may run. Isn't it strange that the political party descended from Jawaharlal Nehru, a party that tries to associate Nehru's name with nearly every new project it launches, should be the champion of introducing quotas from education to recruitment, from promotions in government-controlled institutions to jobs even in the private sector? It takes a lot of audacity (or ignorance) for patriarchs of the party to back these proposals given that they violate the principles that Nehru held dear.

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I recently came across a letter written by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, to the Chief Ministers of all states on 27th June 1961 after a meeting he held with them. It is an interesting document which touches on national integrity and concludes that reservation in services on the basis of caste or community

of reservations and particular privileges' given to people on the basis of caste or group. There is no denying that the excellence and performance of a country depend on merit and therefore that should be the most important consideration in all spheres of activities irrespective of caste, creed and community. This is particularly important in case of services because recruiting a less qualified person means getting inept services for which the general public and the entire society suffers.

The Constitution of India adopted in 1950 ensures that all citizens are equal before the law, free from discrimination on grounds of caste, creed, religion, sex,

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place of birth, and equality of opportunity in education and public appointments. However, the Constitution laid down 'special provisions' for reservation of seats in educational institutions, government services, PSU services, parliament and state legislature for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). Nehru was well aware of this compulsion on the

government and wrote that "they deserve help but, even so I dislike any kind of reservation; more particularly in services. I react strongly against anything which leads to inefficiency and second rate students". And that is exactly what the current problem of this country is - mediocrity. We talk about India attending the top position in the world, but our political compulsion to help weaker sections on

the basis of caste, community or group has already proved to be equivalent to providing ‘some kind of crutches which do not add to strength or health of the body’ as envisaged by Nehru.

Political parties are gradually dividing the entire population of India based on caste, creed and religion which is an impediment to progress and development of any nation. The nation should be divided into two groups of people: rich and poor. The term “backward people” should be redefined strictly in terms of wealth or monetary capabilities. The only sustainable way to help backward people is to provide opportunities for good education, starting from primary to general education and more importantly for technical, scientific and higher education. They should be allowed to have equal opportunity to grow and succeed. It is a myth that only rich and off-springs of educated parents can shine. History is replete with examples of accomplished persons from poor or backward families, as well as poorly performed individuals from rich and educated families. Financial help should be allowed in the form of scholarships or in any other form on a very wide scale to each and every bright boy and girl of poorer classes. Nehru stressed “on the bright and able boys and girls because it is only they who will raise our standards”. It is a fact that there is a vast reservoir of potential talent in this country and we have to nurture these talents in a proper way by giving them opportunities. He continued “But if we go in for reservations on communal and caste basis, we swamp the bright and able and remain second-rate or third rate”. He was grieved to learn that this caste based reservation percolated further and took its share in promotions too. He wrote “it has amazed me to learn that even promotions are based sometimes on communal or caste considerations. This way lies not only folly, but disaster”.

Education has so many varying definitions given from different angles that a single definition hardly satisfies all.

However, the most practical definition is that education helps students develop skills and special abilities which help them primarily to earn their living in a socially approved manner. It also helps to develop abilities to understand what is right or wrong for the society and to interact with other individuals effectively to form a civil society.

Education is power to the people—it must reach all strata of individuals in our society. Education must be spread both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal education means spreading knowledge among all levels of people and it should be the responsibility of the state to support financially every individual of poorer sections of the society irrespective of caste, religion and community. By vertical education I mean higher education which should be restricted to the meritorious and meritorious only. Financial or other support should be given to all underprivileged meritorious students irrespective of caste, creed or community. It is our duty to see that no talent gets wasted due to poverty. Unless higher education is restricted to meritorious and talented students only, research can do very

little for the progress of the country other than India boasting of being the third largest work force of scientists of the world.

Nehru had a modern outlook in many matters. While observing the 125th birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, it will be appropriate to evaluate the appropriateness of his

views and appreciate that are useful for the country cutting across all political lines. What Nehru said fifty years ago is found to be true even today. Nehru’s letter is important at a time when some political parties are trying to create a consensus to include reservation in jobs even in private sectors—the only sector that works on the basis of merit and performance—to reduce it to the same level of inefficiency as in government and PSU organizations. Time has come to rethink over this issue. We hope that the new government will give some attention to it. □

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