

FROM THE EDITOR

TWO ANACHRONISMS

If the founding fathers of our Constitution were optimistic, they were not unrealistically or unreasonably so. They might not have expected the next generation of Indians to have turned into angels under the blessings of freedom, but they expected them to be at least as sensible as themselves. They reserved certain opportunities for the offspring of those who, under an accursed tradition matured down a few centuries, were considered to be low in their 'castes'.

It was hoped that over a few decades the 'reserved' opportunities will bring them on par with the rest of the society. The period was extended because the desired goal was not achieved.

But the goal continues to be as elusive as the mirage in the desert.

The reasons, seen superficially, are simple: those for whom the privileges were reserved have ceased to remember why the privileges were given. They are concerned with the privileges only. Secondly, those who belonged to 'higher' castes did not care for the philosophy of this provision in the Constitution or the ideal of divine oneness of man; they continued to dwell in their fool's paradise.

But this is not the whole truth. An aspect of the truth of the matter remains hidden in a comical, rather farcical, development. Some of the castes who were not considered backward enough for enjoying the privileges, now demand that they be considered backward and be given the privileges. (In the recent past we witnessed such a demand taking a violent turn.) This means at least a chunk of stigma that was attached to the 'lower' caste has been knocked off. Otherwise people who would be prepared to make any material sacrifice for retaining the pride of their caste-superiority would not sacrifice that pride for material gain.

The founding-fathers had expected that we will grow conscious of the falsity of the caste system and that is why the 'higher' ones among us will get over their pride. It has worked out differently. We have perhaps become more practical and, where material gain is concerned, we have learnt not to care two hoots for anything else. Whatever be it, this indicates that at least many of us are not as serious about castes as we once were.

Indeed, the natural forces of progress will compel us to realise some ideas for which the time had come, but unfortunately we will not co-operate with the forces in a spontaneous or dignified way.

Petty politicians cash in on the caste sentiments—which are slowly ceasing to be sentiments and emerging as simple interests, interests based on wrong bases. Who can cry a halt to this ridiculous drift? Surely not the Government, for we the people of Indi\$ have totally identified the government with politicians. We do not look upon the government as an impartial and lofty agency made up of a Constitution, elected representatives voicing the true problems and discussing their solutions without bias and keeping in mind the whole country and, last but not the least, officials ready to serve the people honestly. For us, the government is a bunch of politicians who can be flattered or threatened or blackmailed and accordingly can be made to order about the officials. Most of the politicians have done nothing to dispel this impression of their image; most of the officials have pretended allegiance to individuals and only a few have shown courage to abide by principles.

Who can then change the situation?

What rather than *who*. What can change the situation is our awareness that we will lose our future to a vicious circle unless we jump out of it. Any condition that checks true talent from coming to the forefront is a loss to the country, even if we ignore the despair it causes to the individual talents concerned. At the same time reservation of seats or scholarships or jobs had been deemed a necessity. The best course will be to get over this necessity as fast as we can. Caste was an

anachronism. Reservations in the name of caste should also become an anachronism as soon as possible. We the people must stop politicians or other vested-interest groups from pampering the caste feelings and perpetuating reservations. The so-called higher caste people must give up their overt or covert vanity and do their best to prove that they are no longer interested in claiming a birth-right to status. We have to do these things for the sake of the country. We have come to a stage when nothing but goodwill and faith in one another can assure us of a decent future.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

GNAWING AT THE ROOTS

Our folklore informs us about a committee of wisemen going out in search of the greatest fool. They must have examined many gentlemen in the course of their worthy quest. But at last they settled down on a young man who was found sitting on a tree-branch with legs astride and hacking at the very bottom of the branch. "You'll kill yourself, you fool!" shouted the scholars and hardly had their cry died out when the branch snapped and came crashing down together with its jolly rider. The scholars extended their arms and took hold of the falling man, for they had reasons to save the greatest fool they had chanced upon.

The story is supposed to be two-thousand years old. But its figurative significance not changed. The other day we saw hundreds of trees, some of which had seen several generations of human beings, cut down by mobs bent upon obstructing traffic. Newspapers reported this matricidal action of the mob in bold, but that is about all that could be done. Nobody was booked for this crime against Nature, against the innocent and beneficent trees which protected pedestrians and which had not grown there of their own, but had been planted by man in a planned way. Destroying them was not only barbarity, but treachery.

Two thousand years after the discovery of the greatest fool, we have grown enough wise to cut the trees from their roots. Only the wisdom that we are gnawing at the root of tomorrow's earth, is yet to dawn upon us. We have laws to strip a man of his right to contest an election under certain circumstances. We should also have laws to strip a man of his right to vote in elections when he is found guilty of destroying Nature or the nation's wealth. That, of course, will not be the real solution to the problem. The real solution lies in the political parties taking up the cause of educating the people in their duties and responsibilities instead of simply making them angry in the name of their rights, which in the Indian way of democracy seems to have become the easiest thing to do.