

## Solution for Reservations

The debate over reservations in institutes of higher education has produced much heated controversy and divided friends, and even members of the same family. I think I have found the perfect solution that can heal wounds and be acceptable to everybody.

Students from rural or poor families are seeking reservations primarily because they have little working acquaintance with English as a medium of instruction, and hence get lower marks than students educated in better schools in the English medium. At the same time students who get higher marks are agitating for entrance to institutions to be decided purely on merit, and their cause is very just since all youngsters should have a level playing field, so to speak.

Hence I propose that to judge entrance purely on merit, students from English medium schools be asked to write their exams in any Indian language of their choice, including their mother tongue, while the poorer students battle it out in English which is truly a "foreign language" for them. Then let marks obtained decide the issue.

VITHAL RAJAN  
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## NREGA: Absence of Ownership

It was quite interesting to go through the field observations on the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in Jharkhand (July 22, 2006), which suggest that

the NREGA programme may well follow the same path as the earlier wage employment programmes. The involvement of students from Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University in the field investigation should be appreciated. It may be a trendsetter for involving students in a similar exercise in other parts of the country.

We are convinced that the "absence of owning by the political parties" is an important issue that needs to be addressed. Our field experiences on the pre-launch preparedness of NREGA in Kerala have thrown up similar observations. The authors' point that the "absence of gram panchayats and gram sabhas in the state" has created an institutional vacuum at the field level is also revealing. We agree with their argument that the institutionalisation of the panchayati raj system is required for better administration of the NREGA. However, this may not be a single precondition for better implementation of NREGA, as evident from our Kerala experience. There are larger issues of political economy involved. An analysis of political economy may bring out a possible explanation for the current status of NREGA administration in different parts of the country.

We understand that the authors are undertaking similar studies in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. It would be quite revealing, if a similar study is done in Kerala as well.

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### Correction

In the review, 'Development Economics: Old, New and Newer' (July 8), the author of the chapter on 'Social Capital' should be John Harriss, not John Sender as published.

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Some of the observations on Jharkhand can be tested in this state as well.

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## Broadbasing of Indian Democracy

The article by Sankaran Krishna (June 10, 2006) on the autobiography of Raja Ramanna captures the real picture of the Indian middle class and its aspirations.

The middle class and its authoritarian mindset keeps revealing itself in the Indian public sphere. The Nehruvian period was dominated by the upper caste-oriented Indian middle class. The Emergency brought out its real character. The total support of this middle class to the ruling elite in such periods revealed its fascist nature.

The Mandal I implementation by the central government showed the anti-subaltern mindset of this class. Currently, the anti-reservation struggle of upper caste students is bringing out the age-old 'manuvadi' mindset of the Indian professional

middle class, which is also expressed through its overall dominance in the media.

It forgets the ongoing process of broadbasing of Indian liberal democracy. The social justice movement of India has been democratising the social base of the Indian middle class. The upper caste-oriented middle class has to accept this reality – that it is losing its monopoly – although it has obtained a new space in the “globalised” middle class.

C K VISHWANATH  
Kannur, Kerala

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