

Reservation policy and its evolution



The Eighth Dr B R Ambedkar Birthday Lecture was delivered by Mr Justice Chidananda Ullal, Hon.Judge, High Court of Karnataka. Justice Ullal spoke on *Reservation policy and its evolution* to a packed audience at the S R Valluri Auditorium on 27 April 2001. The lecture was a part of NAL's annual Dr B R Ambedkar birth anniversary function (held every year since 1993) which features a brief ceremony to garland



Dr Ambedkar's portrait, distribution of awards to SSLC students belonging to the SC/ST community for meritorious performance in science subjects (eight students who obtained 99% marks each during the April 2000 SSLC examination received the award this year) besides the Dr B R Ambedkar Birthday Lecture. The function, compered in inimitable style by Mr M R Narasimha Swamy, Head, TS, opened with a melodious invocation sung by Mr Shekhar Anandan. Dr T S Prahlad, Director, welcomed Justice Ullal, with a bouquet of flowers, and then formally introduced the distinguished judge. In his welcome address Dr Prahlad said that the Dr B R Ambedkar birth anniversary function was a "very important event" in NAL's annual calendar and explained the many "pro-active" steps being taken by NAL to ensure a higher degree of social justice especially in the S&T sector: training programmes for SC/ST candidates to develop entrepreneurial skills in computer applications and FRP moulding and the new graduate and diploma training programmes for 20 students started last year. Justice Ullal, who commenced his lecture after garlanding Dr Ambedkar's portrait and lighting the ceremonial lamp, complimented NAL for its many initiatives to foster social justice. He opened his talk by quoting lines from a moving poem written by a black African: "please let me be me!". Reading his lecture from a prepared text ("being a judge I always read from a prepared text, and never go beyond the text!"), Justice Ullal covered wide ground in his narrative on the history and evolution of India's reservation policy against the backdrop of a repressive caste system and expressed his anguish that we still witness violent social conflicts after 52 years of independence ("something, somewhere -- everywhere? -- is surely wrong!"). Paying an eloquent tribute to Dr Ambedkar ("he was a great statesman and upholder of human rights"), the learned judge traced the history of India's reservation movement starting from 1909 (when SC/ST citizens were "unsung and unheard"), on to 1919 when India's untouchables ("whose fate was worse than the slaves of America") were first recognised as a political entity, to the Poona Pact of the early 1930's, the first reservation policy of 1943, the Objective Resolution of 1946 which articulated that "adequate safeguards should be provided to India's repressed" ... down to the Mandal Commission of 1993. The highlight of the lecture, without a doubt, was when Justice Ullal articulated his prescription to achieve social justice: (a) reservation is no panacea for the removal of social ills; (b) ensure rigorous implementation of land reforms and land re-distribution to the backward communities; (c) offer subsidies to promote economic development of the downtrodden; (d) undertake a vigorous propaganda campaign to highlight the historical injustice perpetrated on India's backward communities; (e) SC/ST and OBC communities must make the best use of the reservations and safeguards and give back their best; (f) implement the reservation policy with full seriousness; and, finally, (g) remember that safeguards are not permanent; so try to derive the maximum advantage as long as they stay.

The function ended with a brief ceremony to distribute prizes to top ranking SSLC science students conducted by Mr K R Sarma, Sr COA ("you are India's new young birds with open wings, ready to fly away", he told the children), distribution of two special prizes, offered by last year's speaker Dr (Ms) Selvie Das, for excellence in sports and games, and the vote of thanks by Mr M A Venkataswamy, Convener, NAL SC/ST Welfare Committee.
