

**India's experiment with 'diversity' and representative bureaucracy**  
**Some lessons for Western Europe**

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Paper prepared for the panel 'Managing diversity and the values of bureaucracy',  
NIG Annual Workconference 2010, November 25-26, Maastricht, The Netherlands

# India's experiment with 'diversity' and representative bureaucracy

## Some lessons for Western Europe

### 1. Diversity pressure and reluctance in Western Europe

European governments today are under pressure to 'diversify' the ethnic demographics of their public bureaucracies. Almost as a rule, governments in ethnically plural societies attract claims for more government jobs from ethnic groups feeling inadequately represented in the institutions of the modern state. Since government employment tends to be highly valued for the security and prestige it provides and since bureaucracies are liable to direct political intervention such claims seem all too natural and inevitable. Therefore, one might argue, they could only be expected in the advanced democracies of Western Europe which have seen their societies rapidly change into 'multicultural' or 'multi-ethnic' ones over the past four decades with the influx, especially, of Muslim migrant workers and their families from Mediterranean countries such as Turkey and Morocco. However, today's diversity pressure does not seem to come – certainly not primarily - from these new ethnic groups themselves. In 'my' country, The Netherlands, for instance, I am not aware of organized ethnic minority interests making direct and explicit claims for more jobs in Dutch bureaucracy. If they are voiced at all, certainly not vociferously.

A more important source of current 'diversity pressure' seems to be academia. Since the beginning of the 1990s, advocates of multiculturalism have been contesting the traditional liberal individualist notion that justice can simply be defined in terms of difference-blind rules or institutions (De Zwart 2004). They question the universal notion of citizenship and take issue with liberal democracies' tendency to underappreciate the importance of cultural, or 'ethnic', membership as an important primary good underlying people's choices. Governments' non-recognition of cultural group identities, multiculturalists feel, is unjust, especially to minority groups in plural societies who cannot generally draw on their cultural context to the same degree as majority groups. This cultural context should therefore be protected as a distinct source of political rights (cf. Kymlicka 1995, Meier 2000, De Zwart 2005).

Multiculturalists also critique the traditional liberal conception of representation which encompasses the representation of ideas or interests but does *not* consider their interference with the *identities* of

the carriers of these interests or ideas. The liberal conception of representation is flawed, they claim, because there is no reason to assume, as liberals do, that opinions and beliefs, and the ideas and interests shaped by them, are given objectively and exist independently of those who carry them. If identity, as it clearly does, plays a role in interest formation, members of minority groups, particularly, have good reasons to believe that outgroup representatives cannot represent their interests as adequately as ingroup representatives can. Since it evidently matters *who*, exactly, represents whom governments, according to multiculturalists, should *guarantee* ethnic minority groups' presence in political institutions.

Some strands of multiculturalism have taken the argument even further, picturing cultural and ethnic diversity as "nice", "fascinating", "enriching", and as providing "a source of quality" and a "surplus value" to the societies and organizations possessing them. "Organizations that do not use the qualities of ethnic people," so the argument goes, "do not understand their own interests very well" (cf. Lynch 2005).

Judging by the apparent enthusiasm with which they have adopted 'diversity discourse', introduced 'diversity programs' and hired 'diversity managers', many Western-European governments, indeed, seem to have been heeding multiculturalist advocacy for inclusion of ethnic minority groups in political institutions, including bureaucracy. Yet, governments' embrace of multiculturalism has typically been far from total. Two practical departures from multiculturalist orthodoxy stand out.

Firstly, in as far as European governments have been tempted by multiculturalism, it seems to have been not so much by its arguments about justice as by its, less conspicuous, arguments about *utility*. Members of minority groups have not been doing as well as might have been hoped in their newly adopted societies. In the Netherlands and Belgium, for instance, the youth of some ethnic groups do not perform well at school. Even those *with* degrees often fail to secure employment due to latent discrimination. Thus cut off from the regular economy, some are trying their luck in the extra-legal one. By diversifying its public bureaucracies –its schools, employment bureaus, its police forces, its welfare agencies- to include members of these less successful minority groups, then, governments hope to improve their capacity to 'reach out' to these groups and remedy their inequalities. They count, in other words, on the mechanism of 'representative bureaucracy' through which ingroup bureaucrats – better sensitized as they must be to the needs, aspirations, interests and cultural repertoires of fellow ethnics- will better serve the interests of the ingroup at large than outgroup bureaucrats can.

Secondly, when one scratches the surface of diversity rhetoric and policy discourse, it readily appears that governments are quite reluctant to follow multiculturalist prescriptions to the letter. Though some governments, such as in The Netherlands, have for years been officially 'encouraging' ethnic minorities to apply for vacant posts in bureaucracy, none of them, to my knowledge at least, have gone as far as formally *protecting* and *guaranteeing* ethnic minority presence in bureaucracy, as multiculturalists would have it. Even if they are sympathetic to the idea of ethnic minority inclusion, government elites tend to have strong reservations about giving up the liberal state's principle of 'color-blindness'. And this is exactly what they would have to do if they were to *formally* guarantee ethnic minority group access to bureaucracy.

Such formal guarantees would necessarily also entail affirmative action. After all, if ethnic minority groups do not find their way into bureaucracy *as of course*, formal guarantees require it must be made *easier* for them - through quotas, for instance, or relaxed entry requirements. Most governments, fearing a 'backlash' of ethnic majorities and stigmatisation of ethnic minority members, shy away from such drastic preferential measures. This shyness is only reinforced in countries, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, where electorally successful right-wing populist parties are currently forcing the middle-of-the-road Christian- Democratic, liberal and socialist parties that typically run government to move away from 'soft' multicultural ideas.

Thus, despite their lip-service to diversity and their apparent readiness to deploy representative bureaucracy as an inequality-reduction device, Western-European governments have over all been quite reluctant to take the steps – formal guarantees and affirmative action – needed to make this work. As a result, the extent of 'diversity' or passive representation –to use the jargon of representative bureaucracy theory- of Western-European bureaucracies probably still leaves much to be desired and, therefore, little can as yet be concluded about the effectiveness of ethnic minority bureaucrats in serving wider ingroup interests and reducing interethnic inequalities.

The question that arises, then, is what might happen when governments' commitment to diversity and representative bureaucracy *were* effectively total and sustained over a sufficiently long time to allow the hoped-for effects to materialize. Would more diverse, passively representative bureaucracies spring up? And would ingroup bureaucrats indeed use the discretion invested in their bureaucratic roles to actively represent their ingroup's interests? Interestingly, India provides such a case of 'total and sustained commitment' to diversity and representative bureaucracy. Its experiences with them may therefore be highly informative and instructive. And it is to these experiences that I now turn.

## 2. Creating a representative bureaucracy through reservations

In 1946, on the eve of its country's independence from the British, India's new political leadership set about the important task of drafting a new Constitution. This was done through a prolonged series of constituent assembly debates, spanning three years, in which over 300 prominent members of the Nationalist Movement participated. Most of the issues were pre-discussed in committees, one of which was the Sub-committee on the Minorities. The major problem considered in this deliberative body was which minority groups, if any, were to be granted special protection by the new Constitution and what forms such 'special protection' should take. This issue was pertinent because the previous, British colonial constitutions of 1919 and 1935 had contained special provisions – notably separate representation in the provincial legislatures and reserved quotas in colonial public services - for a number of officially recognized minority groups. Most prominent among these beneficiary groups were the Muslims and the so-called 'depressed classes', an administrative euphemism for untouchables or outcasts, the castes at the bottom of the Hindu caste hierarchy whose touch is traditionally considered polluting by caste Hindus.

British colonial motives for introducing these special provisions had been firmly informed by imperial self-interest. Beginning in the 1920s, the British faced increasingly forceful demands for self-rule by the Mahatma Gandhi-led Congress. Though they were happy to contemplate and introduce limited forms of 'native' political participation, for as long as this seemed a realistic possibility they were *not* willing to give up their rule. In breaking up the unity of nationalist purpose, the British' preferred strategy was to foster disagreements and rifts among native leaders and to facilitate the mobilization of minority groups that were willing to oppose Congress and its claim of speaking on behalf of the entire Indian nation. A commonly used device was to lure and reward dissenting groups with benefits - nominated seats in representative bodies, separate electorates, reservations in bureaucracy - that they could only avail by asserting their *separateness* from the Indian nation which Congress claimed to represent. Indian Muslims were the primary targets of this colonial divide and rule strategy but the untouchables, also, were urged to play their part. After all, as Secretary of State L.S. Amery put it, there were "politically very considerable advantages in having two substantial minorities to whom consideration has to be paid, and not to be put in the position of being merely labeled pro-Muslim and anti-Hindu" (cited in Shourie 1997: 85-6).

And indeed, British efforts at mobilising and grooming a separate untouchable 'community' deeply divided the prominent Indian politicians of the time. There were those who, like Gandhi himself,

were ready to admit to the doctrine of untouchability as a 'horrible and terrible' stain on the Hindu faith, an 'insult to religion and humanity' and a 'a religious atrocity', but who perceived the colonial government's granting of special privileges to untouchables as an ill-intentioned and unjustifiable attack on Hinduism and its essentially 'divine', 'harmonious', 'organic' and 'moral' *varna* (caste) order *per se*. Hinduism was best 'purged' of the 'sinful' belief in untouchability, Gandhians believed, not by way of legislation and other forms of purportedly remedial state action, but through *religious* reform (Bayly 1999, Jaffrelot 2003).

Unlike Gandhi, other prominent politicians were firmly opposed to taking caste and (Hindu) religion as the reference point for constitutional and nationalist politics. Socialist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru (who would later become India's first Prime Minister) rejected all conceptions of an Indian nation built up from intermediate bodies such as religious communities or castes, in favour of a vision of a 'modern', 'secular', casteless and egalitarian Indian nation peopled by 'individuals' – not castes or religious groups- whose political identities and interests would first and foremost be shaped by their socio-economic positions. Though theirs was long a minority view and did not make much of an impact on the struggles over reservations *before* independence, it was these socialist leaders', particularly Nehru's, commitment to a casteless egalitarianism that was to define the spirit of the 1950 Constitution of independent India (*ibid.*)

In the decades preceding independence Gandhi's and Hindu orthodox politicians' key opponent on the issue of untouchability was B.R. Ambedkar, India's first Western –educated and professionally qualified untouchable.<sup>1</sup> Taking a radically un-Gandhian view, Ambedkar considered the caste system an inherently pernicious and oppressive system of 'graded inequality' – 'with an ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt' – that had made 'slaves' and 'broken men' of the untouchables; a system, therefore, that was best 'annihilated' altogether (a view he shared with Nehru). Throughout his life, Ambedkar alternated between two different strategies to accomplish this goal – a pragmatic 'political' strategy, aimed at obtaining specific representation for untouchables in India's political institutions, and a more fundamental 'religious' strategy, aimed at escaping 'the poison of Brahminism' through conversion to another religion (*ibid.*, Jaffrelot 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> Ambedkar gained an MA degree from Columbia University (U.S.) and studied at Grays Inn, where he got his Law degree in 1916, and at the London School of Economics (U.K.).

A famous clash between Ambedkar and Gandhi occurred in 1932. In the consultations over a new constitution, Ambedkar –like other minority leaders had done for *their* groups- had claimed separate electorates for untouchables, a claim that chimed in perfectly with overall British strategy. Gandhi, however, claiming to represent the ‘vast mass of the untouchables’ in his ‘own person’, vowed to resist separate electorates for untouchables with his life and started a fast ‘unto death’ (Galanter 1984: 31; Gupta 1985: 291). In the end, Ambedkar saved Gandhi’s life by dropping his claim of separate electorates in exchange for more reserved seats in the provincial assemblies. The deal between Gandhi and Ambedkar, known as the Poona Pact, was codified in the last colonial constitution – the Act of 1935- and set in motion an intricate machinery of listing, or ‘scheduling’, the new special caste-based constituencies. In 1936, these ‘scheduled caste’ populations were also awarded a 8.33% quota of jobs in the administration; almost as an afterthought, as both the colonial authorities and Ambedkar had long reckoned that reservations of jobs in the civil services for untouchables would not accomplish much given the dearth of educated candidates for such jobs (Bayly 1999, Jaffrelot 2000).

After the British had finally left, in 1947, nothing would have prevented India’s new leaders to abolish the special provisions for colonially sponsored minorities. And, in fact, members of the constituent assembly did decide to eliminate the special treatment of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and other minorities. However, the special provisions for the untouchables, including quotas, or ‘reservations’ as they are called in India, in the public services. Most constituent assembly members straight out accepted that the untouchables had a rightful claim to special treatment by the new Indian state as a compensation for the historical maltreatment meted out to them by Hindu society (cf. Saksena 1981). ‘Historical maltreatment’ was a reference to the elaborate system of prohibitions, prescriptions and sanctions enforced by traditional Hindu society to ensure that the untouchables were kept at a proper distance – to avoid pollution- and were constantly reminded of their lowness. For centuries, untouchables had faced severe restrictions in the use of public goods and services such as wells, schools and roads. The use of certain “luxury” items such as shoes and umbrellas was forbidden to them. They had suffered residential segregation, performed forced labor for upper castes and were often denied the ownership of land. Untouchables who failed to comply with these rules faced cruel sanctions, including torture, murder, sexual abuse and house burning. Extreme poverty, of course, was inherent to the untouchable condition (Dumont 1998, Deliege 1999).

Members of the constituent assembly agreed that untouchables were ‘presently unable to look after themselves’. Without constitutionally guaranteed ‘reservations’ they would certainly be kept out of government service by higher castes intent upon ‘selecting only their own people’. Also, there was

the expectation that reservations would prevent any *future* maltreatment of untouchables. Untouchable officers, it was felt, would surely act as watchdogs over untouchable interests, something which could, arguably, not be expected from the “machinery of the old pattern” operated by “officers belonging to Brahmin and allied castes” (Saksena 1981, Chanchreek 1991). Thus it was decided that, in independent India, 12.5 (and later 15) per cent of public service vacancies were to be reserved for untouchable individuals belonging to any of the 1086 recognized untouchable, or ‘scheduled’, with a new euphemism, castes.

The unanimity among constituent assembly members over untouchables’ deservingness of reservations was not without misgivings, however. In fact, so many feared that reservations would create a highly undesirable vested interest in untouchability that these were initially awarded for a limited period of 10 years, after which their usefulness would be reconsidered. Another commonly held fear was that the award of reservations to untouchables would stimulate other ‘backward’ castes –notably those just above the pollution line- to also seek reservations, opening up the sluice gates for still more claims by still other groups. Assembly member Shri Guptanath Singh aptly captured the mood of the moment:

I want that this demon of distinction and differentiation between man and man should not be allowed to flourish further in free India. But the present structure of society is such that we have been *forced* and our leaders have been forced to accept the principle of protection and reservation. I know we have done it in no happy mood. We desire that these things should be abolished for ever (cited in Saksena 1981).

If anything, reservations for untouchables proved very effective in opening up earlier unattainable civil service jobs to untouchables. In fact, since their retention at independence, reservations have been instrumental in fostering a substantial untouchable bureaucracy. In the central services, as table 1 shows, the increase of untouchable representation has been most notable in the three highest classes, covering senior administrative (Class I), other administrative (Class II) and clerical (Class III) positions, where untouchables’ share increased 25-fold, almost 10-fold and roughly 4-fold, respectively. These proportional increases cover dramatically large increases in absolute numbers. The inconspicuously small minority of 20 untouchable officials who worked in the highest echelons of New Delhi’s federal bureaucracy in 1953, for example, had by 1995 been replaced by a more than 6,000 strong army of untouchable senior administrators.

**Table 1. Representation of untouchables in central services, 1953-1995**

Year	Class I		Class II		Class III		Class IV		Pop. %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1953	20	0.4	113	1.3	24.819	4.5	161.958	20.5	
1960		1.2		2.5		7.2		17.2	14,7
1963	250	1.8	707	3.0	84.714	9.3	151.176	17.2	
1965		1.6		2.8		8.9		17.8	
1970		2.3		3.8		9.9		18.1	14,8
1974	1.094	3.2	2.401	4.6	161.775	10.3	230.864	18.6	
1975		3.4		5.0		10.7		18.6	
1980		5.0		8.5		13.4		19.5	
1984		6.9		10.4		14.0		20.2	15.6
1987	4.746	8.2	7.847	10.5	307.980	14.5	234.614	20.1	
1995	6.637	10.2	13.797	12.7	378.172	16.2	221.380	21.3	

Figures on untouchable representation in the state bureaucracies are notoriously scarce. But the data for Uttar Pradesh, India's largest and most populous state, do indicate a steadily increasing passive representation of untouchables (Table 2).

**Table 2. Representation of untouchables in UP state bureaucracy, 1970-1996**

	Group A		Group B		Group C		Group D		Pop.%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1970	<2.0>				-	6.0	-	6.8	21.0
1985	-	6.8	-	7.5	-	13.6	-	17.8	21.2
1995*	634	9.4	2110	12.1	45575	15.5	27666	18.6	21.1
1996**	852	9.0	3209	10.9	76858	16.4	30020	20.6	21.1

Untouchable representation in the two highest administrative groups hovered around 10 percent in 1996 (Table 2). In groups C and D, the untouchables' percentual shares in civil service positions roughly tripled between 1970 and 1996. Untouchables have thus built up, almost from scratch, a substantial presence in the post-independence Uttar Pradesh bureaucracy where they can be found to work in all echelons, all departments and, quite probably, in every single agency or office. In fact, it is no longer exceptional for untouchable officials to act as chief secretary (the highest administrative position in the state bureaucracy), headed important departments like Appointments, Public Works, Energy, and Excise or serve as principal secretaries to the state's chief minister. In Uttar Pradesh, the untouchables now form the second-largest caste block of officials, after the upper castes, whose numerical predominance continues to be formidable (Verma et al. 1993).

### 3. The price of preference

The success of reservations in improving the passive representation of untouchables has come at a price, however. Reservations have turned out to be difficult to control. As feared by reservations' architects, the introduction of reservations for untouchables sparked a chain reaction of claims for from other groups, usually collections of castes, claiming 'backwardness' and preferential eligibility. In fact, the politicians of independent India turned out adept practitioners of 'the politics of backwardness', routinely using the promise and extension of reservations for electoral purposes. Over time, what started out as a limited, time-bound project of affirmative action for a specific, exceptionally marginalized ethnic category has evolved into what is probably the world's largest program of favourable treatment of lower class groups (cf. Galanter 1984, Sheth 1997, De Zwart 2000).

In India today, reservations have come to regulate the distribution of virtually any public good: small-business subsidies and agricultural loans, membership in development councils, wells, scholarships, rural housing, university admission etcetera. Untouchables are no longer the only beneficiaries. More than 2000 castes directly across the pollution line, the so-called backward castes, have by now secured reservations, just like Mahar Buddhists, sons of the soil and women, to name but a few. In some South Indian states, until the high court ruled this unconstitutional, no less than 90 per cent of public service jobs had come to be reserved for a large collection of 'backward' castes.

The intense political struggle for reservations has not only pitted high castes - typically not among reservations' beneficiaries- against beneficiary lower castes, but also, and increasingly, backward castes against untouchables. Untouchables, who enjoy a relatively generous package of reservations in comparison to other preferred categories, have not escaped the jealous resentment and, at times, violent antagonism of backward –but often equally poor- backward castes. Besides, quota competition has sponsored the accentuation of intra-caste distinctions. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, subsections of backward castes have successfully claimed official recognition -as *most* backward classes (MBCs)- and separate quotas. In a number of states such ingroup differentiation is also evident within the untouchable category, where it typically involves relatively small, newly organized, untouchable castes mobilizing their members against one or a few numerous and leading untouchable castes who, they claim, swallow all or disproportionate shares of reserved benefits. At the same time, the need to safeguard existing reserved benefits from quota-hungry outgroups, continues to provide untouchables with strong incentives to politically cultivate their separateness

and difference from the rest of society, just as the members of the constituent assembly had feared they would (cf. Charsley 1996).

In some states, politics has so much come to revolve around caste and quotas that political parties themselves have steadily 'casteized', overtly picturing themselves as the champions of the interests of well-defined collections of castes of roughly similar social status, and meticulously advertising their candidates' castes to convince their voters that they are to receive their due share (Chandra 2004a). Ironically, then, reservations, introduced as a device for eliminating the *effects* of caste, gave caste a whole new leash of political life.

#### **4. Unrepresentative bureaucracy**

Unwanted as the above developments may have been for the founding fathers of the Indian constitution who envisaged a new, 'colorblind' Indian society devoid of caste, caste conflict and caste politics, the question still remains as to whether untouchables' substantial presence in bureaucracy has resulted, as intended, into the active representation of untouchables' interests by bureaucrats of their own (cf. Mosher 1968, Meier 1993, Lim 2006). In order to find out, some years ago I undertook an in-depth ethnographic study of what I called the dust-level rural development bureaucracy in Sitapur district, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

The Indian rural development bureaucracy was created after independence, in the 1950s, to implement and monitor the central government's newly adopted strategy of planned development in rural areas. Since then, it has developed into an intricate and elaborate hierarchy of offices and posts, extending all the way from "the center" -the federal government in New Delhi-, down to India's innumerable rural villages. What I call the "dust-level" rural development bureaucracy comprises of the two lowest echelons of this bureaucracy: the rural development *blocks* and the village development officers. The bureaucrats manning these echelons carry out a wide-ranging and varying package of centrally- and state funded rural development and poverty alleviation programs, ranging from the introduction and promotion of agricultural innovations (e.g. new seeds and fertilizers), the provision of elementary needs (drinking water, housing), the improvement of local infrastructure (roads, village assembly halls), to the creation of employment and educational opportunities. In the process, dust-level bureaucrats (DLBs) select beneficiaries and distribute money, material resources, attention, knowledge and information (Maheswari 1995).

When I started my research, to me, the rural development bureaucracy had appeared a promising one to explore the connections between passive and active representation. After all, it complied with all conditions proposed by representative bureaucracy theorists as being conducive to active representation: its organizational mission was sympathetic to the vast mass of rural untouchables, the benefits provided through its programs were in high demand, its ranks were filled with plenty of dust-level untouchable officials possessing, nominally at least, considerable discretion in influencing and determining the allocation of the benefits under its control.

Despite these ostensibly favorable circumstances, however, I encountered no active representation on the part of the untouchables in Sitapur's rural development bureaucracy. One reason for this was that DLBs felt forced to allow local politicians, or *netas* (as the locals call them), usurp the administrative discretion formally invested in their own roles. As in many other parts of India, Sitapuri *netas* –and there were many of them- typically acted on the assumption that the votes they needed to capture and hold on to political power could be most successfully won by acting as so-called *patrons* to voters. That is to say, they spent much, if not most, of their time and energy on locating, capturing and distributing *patronage* to their followers or to those whose electoral support they courted. In Indian politics, virtually any public resource can be, and often is, turned into patronage by politicians: government jobs, wells, housing, roads, land security, schools, telegraph lines, power connections, water, loans, hospital beds, police protection, ration cards, university admission, business licenses and permits. Also the *access* to political or administrative authorities who can influence or, even better, *decide* on the allocation of these benefits can, and very often is, turned into patronage (cf. Brass 1966, Chandra 2004b). Thus, I found Sitapur's politicians to be literally 'in business', the business of exchanging public goods for votes.

*Netas'* preoccupation with channelling concrete, material benefits to their constituencies meant, of course, that they were effectively taking over the job of Sitapur's bureaucrats who generally rested content with *administering* and *codifying* the decisions they should, formally, have made themselves. What is more, bureaucrats, more often than not, actively *facilitated* the patronage transactions and of *netas*: by alerting *netas* to patronage opportunities vested in public programs, by keeping the availability of public benefits a secret to potential beneficiaries, and by ensuring that the official paperwork reflected central authorities' intentions and requirements, rather than patronage political ground realities.

At closer look this puzzling bureaucratic behavior appeared quite understandable. Unlike bureaucrats in many other political systems, Indian bureaucrats may be rather easily disciplined or punished by

politicians if they are found to be 'uncooperative'. By far the most important and commonly used tool of control that Indian politicians have over salaried government employees is the power to transfer bureaucrats from one post to another (cf. De Zwart 1994). Though bureaucrats do not regard all transfers as punishments, they tend to have a strong dislike for postings in peripheral, 'backward', 'jungli' and 'violent-prone' areas, far away from the modern comforts and facilities – clean drinking water, good health and educational facilities - of urban centers. Hence, they are usually quite ready to do what it takes to satisfy the wishes of powerful patronage politicians if by so doing they can prevent an unfavourable transfer.

Besides, Sitapuri bureaucrats also had a financial motive for cooperating with netas. Involvement in patronage politics offers many opportunities for making money on the side. Sitapuri netas usually collected bribes from villagers in return for helping them secure public benefits, for example. They also creamed off proportions of development program outlays and *sold* benefits such as stoves, water pumps, and subsidised kerosene oil on the free market, against free market rates, to line their own pockets. Officials willing to cooperate with netas in these rent-seeking activities could usually expect to be rewarded with a share in the profits. In a sense, they often effectively *needed* the money to influence the course of their careers. Money proved a very useful resource in cultivating connections with big netas and superior officials, whose protection or help might come in handy in managing various sorts of problems. In exchange for financial compensation, netas or superior officials were generally willing to reconsider unfavourable transfers or, conversely, to extend help in arranging a choice posting, for example.

The patronage logic in which untouchable bureaucrats in Sitapur had to operate thus largely prevented them from becoming active representatives of the interests of the untouchables in their jurisdictions. Discretionless as they were, they simply did not have the *opportunity* to act as active representatives of the local untouchable population.

But more often than not they also seemed to have *no desire* to do so. In the course of their lives many untouchable bureaucrats had continued to experience their untouchability as a stigma, as something deeply discrediting that disqualifies them from full social acceptance (Goffman 1963). They emphasized that their untouchability was 'still there', even if its outward manifestations have changed dramatically in the course of their lives. The manifest, common, almost taken-for-granted traditional untouchability of their childhood days in the village, and the less blatant but nevertheless palpable untouchability of their student days in the city had gradually been replaced by the countless little, nasty, unobtrusive but hard to ignore ways in which upper caste colleagues or superiors

manage to express or reveal their apparent hostility, disapproval, distrust, unease or discomfort: evasive refusals to have tea or meals together, 'dirty' jokes, or the grieving withholding of sociability, all amounting to the realization that, as one untouchable DLB put it, 'untouchable officers may be tolerated, but they will not be accepted'. Hence, to many untouchable officials their untouchability was not a mere accident of birth from which they had long since escaped by gaining entrance to India's prestigious bureaucracy. On the contrary, it continued to 'spoil', to use Goffman's terms, their identities.

Probably the most commonly employed strategy by individuals who fear stigmatization and its consequences is to try and conceal their stigma from outsiders in order to 'pass' as normal (cf. e.g. Goffman 1963, Anspach 1979, Siegel et al. 1998, Adkins and Ozanne 2005), Untouchable officials proved no exception in this regard. Since untouchability is a social - *not* a physical, visible - stigma, name change offered itself as a particularly effective passing strategy. Many DLBs had adopted surnames which did not immediately give away their untouchable identities or which *suggested* upper caste status. Some, for example, had started using the surname Singh; a particularly unobtrusive surname, traditionally used by upper caste Rajputs and a host of 'middling' castes (as well as Sikhs) all over north India. Others called themselves Verma, a surname associated with upper caste Kayasths and with the Kurmis, a rather populous and respected middle landowning caste in Sitapur and the rest of central Uttar Pradesh.

Also, untouchable officials typically displayed a marked reluctance to openly identify as or with untouchables. In my dealings with them I was struck by the tenacity with which they avoided discussion of such touchy or painful issues as caste and untouchability. Most of them took obvious care not to refer to other untouchables in such a way as to signal that these were somehow seen, considered or felt by them to be members of some ingroup to which also they themselves belonged. In fact, I did not encounter a single untouchable official who *spontaneously* spoke of untouchable clients as 'my people' or some such label or referred to himself and purported fellow untouchable colleagues in 'we'-terms. Sometimes, untouchable officials who apparently felt that I came too 'close' would avoid talking to me. Those who could somehow be persuaded to reflect upon the untouchable aspects of bureaucratic operations and interpersonal relations, often did so in awkward, objectivist, distancing terms, speaking for example about 'majority' and 'minority communities' in the third person singular or plural. Even then, such conversations would usually occur in the safe confines of officials' homes, rather than in public or official contexts where there was always the danger of strangers or outsiders listening in and finding out.

Many untouchable officials thus routinely deployed an array of passing strategies, making them, for most intents and purposes, *unrecognizable* as untouchables to outsiders, including their purported ingroup clients. This successful passing on the part of untouchable bureaucrats prevented 'their' clients from knowing whether they were in fact represented by one of their own in the bureaucracy and, thus, from effectively claiming preferential or sympathetic treatment on the basis of common identity.

## 5. Lessons

India's six-decade long experiment with diversity and representative briefly sketched here is a fascinating one. It may also be taken, I guess, as a warning to overly enthusiastic advocates of diversity and representative bureaucracy.

1. One lesson clearly provided by the Indian case is that the creation of diverse bureaucracies through formal guarantees to explicitly targeted ethnic groups may produce an array of unwanted side effects that may prove difficult to control. The granting of formal guarantees to 'backward' groups may set in motion a perverse logic in which groups *vie* for backwardness and have every reason to maintain the spoiled identities that formal guarantees were designed to wipe out.
2. Another Indian lesson is that the mechanism of representative bureaucracy cannot be expected to play itself out in any kind of political system. Where bureaucrats in modern Weberian bureaucracies may perhaps be in a position to use their discretion for representative purposes, bureaucrats in the patronage democracies typically have good reasons to *shun* discretion. Their main interest and focus will be to keep politicians in good humor, by *refraining* from active and intimate dealings with clienteles and from meddling into redistributive decision making.
3. A third lesson provided by India's experiment is that the mechanism of representative bureaucracy might perform worst for the groups who need it most: the kind of extremely disadvantaged, stigmatised groups such as Indian untouchables. Membership of such groups, make one into the object of scorn, hatred, fear or -as in the case of Indian untouchables- *disgust* to members of majority outgroups. Given the great advantages arising from being considered "normal", bureaucratic members of stigmatized groups, such as Sitapur's dust-level bureaucrats, will thus far more likely hide and downplay their group identity than use it as a source for active representation.

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