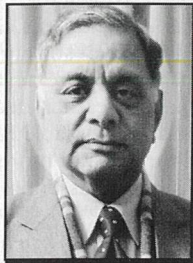


Do We Have Too Many Reservations?

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

Group Discussion is a method used by most organisations, both formal and informal, to exchange ideas on a subject or situation, mostly to find a solution or gather more information. This is so because discussing a subject in a group generates more ideas and helps in finding out a solution faster. The whole concept is to bring together a set of people on a common platform to share their views. However, currently, group discussions are also effectively utilised as a tool to assess several personality traits of a candidate for selection or screening aspirants for admissions as well as entry-level jobs. Depending on the firms or organisations, the group discussion could be the first or the last step in the selection process. Generally, organisations conduct group discussions after the written tests to assess the interactive skills of candidates and how good they are at interacting with other people. While the candidates are taking part in a group discussion, assessors can evaluate several skills of the candidates. These include self-confidence, leadership, listening skills, awareness, assertive attitude, cooperation, analytical abilities, etc. To assess candidates on these skills, usually, group discussions are divided into two categories i.e., Topic-based GDs and Case-study-based GDs. In the topic-based group discussion, candidates are given a topic. The given topic could be a factual topic, a controversial topic or an abstract topic. In the Case-study-based group discussion, rather than giving a subject, candidates are given a case study, which leads to the questions to be discussed by the group of candidates.

For the selection of candidates for admission to a prestigious MBA institute, nine candidates were called to participate in a group discussion. All candidates arrived formally dressed for this formal interaction and on their arrival, after verification checks, etc., they were allotted Identification Numbers. These numbers were pinned on their shirts so that they are readable from a distance. The candidates were asked to sit in a semi-circle to ensure that all candidates could see each other and the three assessors could also conveniently observe them. Thereafter,



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a detailed briefing was conducted to apprise candidates of all the rules that they had to follow during the conduct of this group discussion. They were informed that the three assessors would not intervene and only observe the proceedings. Candidates were at liberty to speak as much as they wanted and as many times as they wished. They were also at liberty to speak for or against the topic. But, they must take care to ensure that all candidates get an opportunity to express their views on the topic. Secondly, they must participate in the group discussion in an orderly fashion, which implied that only one candidate should speak at a time. Subsequently, they were given three topics and asked to pick up one topic for the discussion after mutual consultation. After a brief discussion, the above topic was chosen by this group for the GD. Candidates were then allowed 5 minutes to recollect their thoughts and note down some points on a paper, which they may refer to while they were speaking. Finally, candidates were told that they must conclude the group discussion in 25-30 minutes.

The group discussion then proceeded in the following manner:

Candidate No. 9 : Good morning friends. Hope all of you are ready and keen to participate in this GD on this interesting and hotly-debated topic. To initiate our discussion, I would say that earlier the Supreme Court had laid a ceiling of 50% on all reservations, which was later amended to introduce a 10% additional quota for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) of our society by the government by bringing a Constitutional Amendment Bill. This implied that total reservations would now add up to about 60%. This move of the government created a lot of heart burns and the increase of quota limit by the government was challenged in the Supreme Court. Recently, the Supreme Court has ruled that increasing the quota of reservations by the government is justified. As a result of this decision, there will now be two reservation streams—one based on caste and the other on poverty. This has now generated fresh debate on this topic. We will now discuss the repercussions of this recent judgement of the Supreme Court and whether we really have too many quotas. You all may now express your views on this development.

Candidate No. 8 : Yes, I think Number 9 has introduced this topic quite appropriately and provided us with the background information on this important topic.

Candidate No. 1 : I think, the economic criterion for quotas had been mooted ever since the time of the V.P. Singh Government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission report on OBC reservations. Am I right?

Candidate No. 6 : Let me put things in perspective by showing some facts about this debate. It was way back in 1991 that the government of the day at that time had tried to reserve 10% of posts in the government for economically backward sections of the people, who were not covered by any of the existing schemes of reservation. When this decision was taken to the court, it was in 1993 that the Supreme Court delivered a judgement capping quotas at 50% and disallowing any additional quota for the poor. In 2005-06, a Commission was appointed

by the government to look into the matter, which submitted its report in July 2010. Thereafter, in 2014 a Bill was made ready by the government to bring in the economic criteria for reservations. This is the background of the present controversy.

Candidate No. 3 : Yes, let me add that subsequently in 2019, our government declared that it was hiking seats in Central educational institutions for bringing in the 10% Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservations so as to not affect quotas for SC, ST and OBC beneficiaries. Thus the issue of introducing economic criteria for reservations has been on the horizon for quite some time and a Bill in this regard was eventually enacted in 2019.

Candidate No. 9 : Yes, quite right. The politics behind the EWS quota had run its course in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. It became an election issue as the government sensed that there was considerable heartburn among unreserved groups of our society. Finally, it was the 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 2019 which was the result of a series of reservation agitations by socially-dominant groups of our society. The 10% EWS quota was introduced under this Act by amending Articles 15 and 16 of our Constitution. It is for economic reservation in jobs and admissions in educational institutes for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and is basically enacted to promote the welfare of the poor not covered by the 50% reservation policy.

Candidate No. 7 : I think Numbers 3 and 9 have explained the enactment of this Amendment Act quite well.

Candidate No. 8 : But, can some friend tell us who is considered economically backward?

Candidate No. 6 : Yes, the Centre had fixed Rs. 8 lakh income per year as the ceiling to determine economically weaker sections. Thus, the EWS quota makes persons with less than Rs. 8 lakh gross annual family income eligible. This quota excludes Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, who form homogeneous groups included in the prevalent 50% reservation granted separately.

Candidate No. 1 : Let me add that it is interesting to note that 12 States and Union Territories have already introduced the EWS quota. These include Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Assam and others.

Candidate No. 3 : Friends, I think after the introduction of this quota for the EWS, one more round of litigations

seems to be in the offing about its implementation, as the Court did not examine the criteria fixed by the Centre for EWS, including Rs. 8 lakh income per annum, which the Supreme Court had earlier observed to be unreasonable.

Candidate No. 5 : So, this issue may take some more time to be settled by the Court. Meanwhile, uncertainty about the EWS quota would continue.

Candidate No. 9 : Another important issue is whether the 103rd Constitutional Amendment can be said to breach the basic structure of the Constitution. The Supreme Court has now held that its earlier decision was not inflexible and inviolable for all times to come and further, not more than 50% reservation is not an essential feature of our Constitution.

Candidate No. 6 : Friends, may I remind you that B.R. Ambedkar wanted reservations only for 10 years, but it has now continued for 70 years. I think a very important issue now is to review the manner of identification and ways of determining backward classes and also ascertain whether the criteria adopted are relevant for today's conditions. I think the social and economic structure of our country has undergone drastic changes over all these years and that is why this review is extremely significant. Am I right?

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, I quite agree with you.

Candidate No. 3 : Friends, the Supreme Court has also held that the quota system should not be allowed for an indefinite period and a time-limit needs to be fixed to pave the way for a casteless and classless society. Secondly, reservation is not an end but a means to secure social and economic justice and it should not be allowed to become a vested interest.

Candidate No. 9 : Yes, I agree. The development and spread of education have resulted in a larger number of backward-class members attaining an acceptable standard of education and employment. These people should be removed from the backward category so that attention can be paid to those classes which genuinely need help. I think this is extremely important.

Candidate No. 4 : Quite right. I fully agree.

Candidate No. 6 : I would also like to inform you that a large number of people also feel that the Supreme Court judgement upholding 10% reservation to people belonging to economically weaker sections (EWS) in upper castes in admissions and government jobs, is a setback to the century-long social justice struggle. We need to pay attention to

this point of view also. Isn't it?

Candidate No. 8 : I also feel that permitting the breach of the 50% rule becomes a gateway for further violation by political parties to introduce more quotas. Do you think, it would be at all desirable?

Candidate No. 3 : Yes, I agree with this. After all, when you introduce quotas and expand them further, you reject merit. Tomorrow somebody may say why quotas are only for jobs and education, why not extend them to other fields also? There is no end to it. That will be disastrous, to say the least.

Candidate No. 9 : I would like to add that in the US, racial quotas have been declared unconstitutional by the courts. Of course, some countries have introduced legal and non-legal measures to guarantee the political representation of ethnic minorities in the executive, legislative or regional governments. But, every quota aimed at correcting historical injustice also creates a current injustice. Upper-caste people who have never discriminated against anyone and who have worked hard and scored higher marks will lose out to those with lower scores. This certainly works against merit and excellence. I strongly feel the government should give good scholarships and launch other attractive schemes to help the needy rather than allotting quotas. Am I right?

Candidate No. 6 : Yes, while quotas were introduced in India to help those who are historically disadvantaged, now political parties are always keen to expand quotas to gain political advantage over their rivals. Political parties are never keen to limit quotas or set time-limits on quotas. We need to consider all these aspects when we support quotas. Moreover, we are living in an age when new technology is being introduced at a very fast pace in every field and we need merit to keep pace with these developments. In the current scenario, we need to promote merit and not encourage any measure which works against the promotion of merit.

Candidate No. 7 : Quite right. I think Numbers 9 and 6 have really made very significant points to highlight that we already have adequate reservations and increasing these quotas may lead to more problems in the future. Isn't it?

Candidate No. 3 : I feel the introduction of this new quota simply means that additional reservation benefits will now be available to the poor as well and those who have taken the benefit of reservation earlier are excluded from getting the advantage for the second time. But, there must be an upper limit for quotas and it should not

be left to the political parties to continue increasing it at their convenience to gain political advantage in elections. With the introduction of the new quota, it seems that the reservation initiative will be pushing ahead with new confidence now. There are demands for reservations for Jats, Gujjars and others and there have been even calling for reservations proportionate to the population as well. There is no end to these demands.

Candidate No. 9 : Yes, I also feel that we already have too many reservations. If you ask me, ideally, there should be no reservation, but if due to certain historical social and economic considerations, we do need them, then there must be an upper limit prescribed for it. This has become significant after the recent judgement of the Supreme Court where the court allowed breaching of the 50% upper limit to all quotas.

Candidate No. 5 : I agree with Numbers 3 and 9 when they say that there must be an upper limit to all categories of reservations.

Candidate No. 6 : Friends, I feel that eventually, India will pay the cost for all the energy and effort spent on this welfare route of reservations, rather than investing in good education and creating more jobs and training our youth to handle the latest technology. All said and done, basically, reservation is anti to the modern values of equality and liberty. Reservation can be described as a knee-jerk reaction to serious problems of caste-based discrimination and poverty. Unfortunately, the framers of our Constitution had considered reservation as a temporary measure to help the deprived, but now reservations are considered a birthright by certain people in our society.

Candidate No. 3 : I would like to add that when our Constitution was drafted, our society was quite different. People belonging to ST/SC/OBC were discriminated against and were not given opportunities for education, jobs and other facilities owing to traditional societal and political norms. The term "untouchability" was also common. Our Constitution-drafters made sure that every citizen received equal treatment and equality before the law. Things are much different now and people are now asking whether we still need a reservation system. A large number of our talented students are going abroad as they are not getting appropriate opportunities to work in our country, while students much lower in merit are getting good opportunities, which certainly is not desirable.

Candidate No. 1 : Yes, not only that, the rich and even elites from ST/SC/OBC category often misuse this system

at the cost of more talented people. Further, the system also lacks transparency as people in these categories have not been fully listed due to inadequate surveys to identify people who belong to these reserved categories.

Candidate No. 9 : I agree and would like to add that if the reservation system cannot be removed altogether, it does need modification. To my mind, we already have too many reservations. We don't need religion or caste-based reservations and reservations must only be based on economic criteria. That would really help the deprived and deserving people. This system destroys meritocracy and frustrates more deserving people, which is not at all desirable for a developing country like India.

Candidate No. 8 : Quite right. Poverty and backwardness do not recognise any caste. Currently, people make fake caste certificates and claim reservations in education and jobs. Certainly, reservations were to end and not increase with time.

Candidate No. 7 : Friends, I may not disagree with what you are saying, but many people believe that the caste system is still prevalent in our country, therefore, it may not be feasible to abolish all reservations presently. So, what do you think is the right approach to handle this problem?

Candidate No. 6 : Yes, I would suggest, as we see in so many countries abroad, we should give free quality education and scholarships for the underprivileged poor students instead of providing them with reservations. We need to give chance to deserved rather than the reserved.

Candidate No. 5 : Friends, the time allotted to us to finish this GD is getting over and we must conclude it now.

Candidate No. 4 : If you all agree, we may ask Number 3 to conclude this discussion.

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, I agree.

Candidate No. 3 : Well, we all had a very informative and detailed discussion on this currently hot topic. We have covered some significant aspects of the currently prevailing reservation system in our country, especially after the recent Supreme Court judgement which increased the quota of reservation beyond the 50%, which was the limit earlier imposed by it. Even though ever since Independence, we had a system of affirmative system of reservations for the socially and educationally backwards which added up to 49.5%. In 2019, just before the Lok Sabha elections, Parliament approved an additional 10%

reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and many States took action to implement it also. This increase in quota was challenged in the courts and the Supreme Court has now recently ruled that this increase in quota was justified. Subsequent to this ruling, this topic is once again being hotly debated. It is argued that the recent judgement has opened Pandora's box for more quotas and politicians may increase quotas to meet their political goals. Reservations work against meritocracy and demoralise the more deserving and talented and also lead to brain drain. A developing country like India certainly needs services of better talent. It is felt that we must put an upper limit to all kinds of reservations, as India already has a sufficient number of quotas.

Thank you, friends and you all have a good day.

Critical Analysis of Candidates' Performance:

Good: 3, 6 and 9

These candidates remained the main speakers during this entire group discussion. The way they spoke indicated that they had devoted sufficient time to prepare this subject. These candidates spoke with confidence and presented relevant data to support their arguments. They brought out significant information on this topic, which was duly accepted by other candidates. They made this group discussion interesting and informative through their good contribution. Due to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Good'.

Average: 1 and 8

These candidates did make some contribution towards the progression of this group discussion. They had some idea about this subject but did not have much information to make a more useful contribution towards this discussion. Their participation remained limited only. Obviously, this was the result of their inadequate preparation. It goes without saying that if they had put in more effort, they could have performed much better. They should have realised that it is very important to prepare a number of important topics before participating in a competitive group discussion like this one. Due to these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Average'.

Below Average : 2, 4, 5 and 7

These candidates spoke off and on, but only to appreciate other candidates or request other candidates to speak. Their participation was quite inadequate and they merely kept listening to other active participants during the entire proceedings. It is apparent that this was the direct result of their lack of effort to prepare this topic. Their own contribution towards this discussion was hardly noticeable. They need to appreciate the significance of good preparation before participating in a group discussion. Due to these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Below Average'.

CSR