

## 'Providing equal opportunities must for achieving inclusive growth'



*L-R: **Ajay Mehta**, Executive Director, National Foundation for India; **Chandrajit Banerjee**, Director General, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII); **Karti Chidambaram**, Member, All India Congress Committee; **Lakshmi Venkatesan**, Founding Trustee and Executive Vice-President, Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST); **Sudheendra Kulkarni**, Advisor to L.K.Advani , Leader of the Opposition, Lok Sabha; Moderator: **Ravi Bhoothalingam**, Founder and Chairman, Manas Advisory*

Better education and providing equal opportunities to the marginalized is an imperative need to achieve inclusive growth in our country. This was the dominant thought at the concurrent session on '**Marginalised India: Beyond Affirmative Action**', a part of the 'Ideas India 2008' seminar, being conducted in New Delhi by Aspen Institute India.

The session sought to focus on ways other than reservations to bring the marginalized sections of the society into the mainstream, as pointed out by session moderator and **Founder & Chairman, Manas Advisory, Mr Ravi Bhoothalingam**.

"In last 61 years outcome of various efforts, including affirmative action, has been very poor," said **Mr Ajay Mehta, Executive Director, National Foundation for India**. "The process of mainstreaming the marginalized has over the years come to mean people joining the power structure whereas the process should lead to working for the people," he pointed out. In this context, purpose of affirmative

action needs to be precisely defined again as it has been lost in the process and identity politics has gained currency, Mr Mehta said. "There is a serious problem in addressing the issue of poverty alleviation," he opined adding, "There is a need to build a new structure to tap potential solidarity of people and to bring the poor together."

**Mr Karti Chidambaram, Member of All India Congress Committee,** challenged the concept of affirmative action prevalent in India. "I would say that we don't really have affirmative action in our country," he said adding, "whatever such action is there till now is limited to government jobs and public sectors." He stressed on the need to break out of caste considerations and "look for equality of opportunities and not just equality of outcomes." According to Mr Chidambaram, this meant education at equal footing. "Unless education standards are improved and the children of decision-makers do not start going to government schools, there will be no fundamental change," he said.

Responding to a query from the moderator on corporate India's reaction to a wake-up call on affirmative action, **Mr Chandrajit Banerjee, Director-General, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII),** said that "corporate world can help on four parameters: providing equal opportunities in employment, employability, education and entrepreneurship." This, he said, can be done without any government legislation. "In fact, there should be no government legislation to force people to take affirmative action," he said. Mr Banerjee pointed out that corporate India has in fact been able to help the marginalized group over the years by providing opportunities in entrepreneurship.

**Ms Lakshmi Venkatesan, Founding Trustee and Executive Vice-President, Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST),** spoke about ways to a multiply opportunities for the marginalized. She recounted the story of a successful young entrepreneur who got access and support to win a major international award. "It did not matter at that point that he belonged to a Scheduled Caste (SC) community," she said. She supported the idea of giving equal opportunities to the marginalized but added that to make it successful "it is important to provide support and right kind of mentoring." According to her, "creating a real support structure was necessary and once that is done, giving quotas would no longer be important."

**Mr Sudheendra Kulkarni, Advisor to L K Advani,** Leader of the Opposition, Lok Sabha made his point by pointing at the global context. "In the global economic order, India is moving from the margins to centre of the stage," he said. A similar process is there for the marginalized within the country and "we have to find ways to hasten the process," he pointed out. He said that reservations, a constitutional necessity, have served us well, but must go beyond what has been achieved. "Providing economic justice to the marginalized is what we should aim at," he said, adding, "we have to look at broadbasing and democratizing the

parameters of power, prosperity and social prestige." The key to his, according to him, was good governance.

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