

READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW.

Sixty years after independence, the caste question looms large in our consciousness. Far from being abolished, the caste system is at the centre of many debates of the day. Whether it is the larger question of the importance of caste in electoral politics, reservations, whether caste should be part of the census or not or the outrage over the Khap panchayat's actions, it is clear that caste is an arena of contention even today.

There is a part of India which sees caste as an outdated institution that needs to be erased from all our calculations. It sees caste as a blight on modernity, a pathogen that infects us. Caste binds us to a collective rooted in the past and imposes on individuals a destiny that is not of their making. Caste hierarchy makes our future contingent on our birth, and those less fortunately born are condemned to a life more ordinary. What makes this more complex is the accelerated attempt to reverse history by the device of reservations which allocate opportunities purposively to the lower castes. This makes the distaste for caste even greater in the educated middle class, who see it as an instrument created for use specifically against them. The advantages that have accrued to this group have been internalised and neutralised and only the disadvantages loom threateningly, particularly 1 as the lower castes accumulate political power.

It is interesting that the distaste for caste and its classification as a social evil has such wide currency. If the underlying purpose, that of ensuring that birth does not determine destiny, and that the individual must begin with a clean slate in building one's life, were indeed that important, then the idea of inheriting property should be seen as being equally unfair. After all, in today's world, nothing determines our life's trajectory as much as money. The fact that opponents of caste-based reservations are open to using economic criteria suggests that even they accept the unfairness of birth-determined wealth. Why is caste such an anachronism and inheritance such a modern idea? The idea is made to seem natural in the myth that markets create that everyone can aspire to becoming wealthy, and uses as its poster children, the lucky few who have built empires from scratch. We can admire them, but to argue that because some people are able to overcome constraints imposed on them by circumstances, no attempt should be made to level the playing field is not an argument that stands up to scrutiny. It would then seem that our distaste for the past is selective. The class that protests caste but celebrates inheritance is the one that has nothing left to gain from caste and everything to lose if property rights are reformed. Of course, the larger market discourse makes this selective discrimination seem legitimate and modern.

## QUESTIONS

1. On the basis of your reading make notes on the above passage. 4
2. Write the summary of the passage in your own words. 4