

At the age of 10, I experienced a very bad incident. My father was my first teacher and when I was at his school, a school inspector came to my school and he was a so-called upper-caste man. For some reason, I touched him. I don't know how, but I touched him. He took a cane from my father and in front of him, he beat me like an animal. But my father couldn't open his mouth because he would lose his job. That is when I came to know we were untouchables.

In school, I was not the top-most student but I was one of the best students in the class. But some teachers discouraged me from coming to school. When I worked in Hyderabad, I was a programmer, a respectable position, but it was very difficult for me to get accommodation if I said my caste.

In the university, we all look the same, but you are recognised by your surname or your religion. In Andhra Pradesh, most Dalits are Christian so if you say you are Christian, they will say, "He is a Dalit," and they will start doing their nonsense.

### **What do you think of reservation?**

India has beautiful laws on the books but they are never implemented. Ambedkar helped write the constitution; he helped enact so many laws that are anti-discriminatory. But still, because the people who are ruling the country don't want to discourage discrimination, they have never been implemented properly. If the Indian government and Indian leaders implemented the already-enacted laws, these problems will be (solved) easily, but that is not happening.

### **How does American affirmative action compare to reservation?**

The difference is that American affirmative action is not in the Constitution. In India, Ambedkar put it in the constitution because he knew that the high-caste people don't want these people to come up. So he instituted reservation. The problem is, who is implementing them?

I am a Dalit Christian. If I were a good student and I wanted to go to an engineering college, I could not go because reservation is only for Hindu Dalits. But in our area, Hindu Dalits are labourers and cannot get to college. When I applied for college, I could not get that seat, but there were no other people from my community to apply. So what happened? Those seats are given back.

Reservation has not been implemented properly so far. They have not been implemented in the way that Ambedkar imagined, when he enshrined them in the Constitution for 10 years. What he expected was that within 10 years, leaders would see to it that Dalits received education, discrimination would be gone, and we would be on par with others and there would be no more need for reservation. What the current leaders are doing is they are not implementing them in the proper way but they are extending them forever.

### **What policy reforms do you suggest?**



A lot of things can be done. Right now, there are two types of education: private and government. If you are poor, you go to a government school and afterward, you can't read or write to standard. What I say is give them equal opportunity. Provide hostel facilities where they can live and study, and financial aid to people who are from below the poverty line, so that there are incentives