



ROLE OF CASTE IN INDIAN POLITICS

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Abstract

The caste system is a predominant aspect of the social and political structure in India. Caste is the most ancient feature of Indian social system and it is a major factor in the structures and functions of the Indian political system. The word ‘caste’ is derived from the Spanish word ‘caste’ which means race. People born in particular race have their separate caste. It defines all social, economic and political relationships for the individual. Caste is a notable foundation of social stratification in India. Indian politics is caste-ridden politics. Caste determines the nature, organization, and working of political parties, interest groups, and all political structures and their functions. Indian society has been highly segmented along the lines of castes, religion, class, etc, it eventually prevents the true working of Parliamentary democracy. The basic objective of this paper is to analyze the role caste in Indian politics and how it becomes a major cause of serious concern and become an obstacle to the national integration. This paper concludes with a suggestion to overcome these challenges.

Keywords: Caste, Social stratification, Indian Politics and Society.

Introduction

Caste in Indian society refers to a social group in which affiliation is largely determined by birth. This caste system became fixed and hereditary with the rise of Hinduism. The Laws of Manu (Manusmitri) refer to the impurity and servility of the outcastes while affirming the dominance and total impunity of upper castes. Those of the lowest caste are informed that their place in the caste hierarchy is due to their sins in their past life. Vigorous punishments of

torture and death are designed for crimes like getting literacy or insulting a member of a dominant caste. Manusmitri, the most reliable text of Hindu religion legitimizes social exclusion and introduces absolute inequality as the guiding rule of social affairs. Caste still very much matters to Indian citizens even in the modern world, though one must point out that different groups of citizens have different reasons for maintaining the system of caste. The upper castes want to keep caste alive to oppress the lower castes thereby maintaining their domination. It is very often to see that the lower caste groups, who are supposed to hate the caste system, also use their caste identity to gain benefits in the corridors of power and politics and, at the same time, they want to put a stop to the caste oppression imposed upon them by the upper castes. It is an ironical and interesting situation of Indian society in modern India.

In fact, it was intended to show that the four classes were in relation to social organization in the same relation as the different organs of Primordial Man to his body. Together they had to function to give vitality to the body politic but the caste system has grown to the level of retarding the growth of an individual in the name of caste and thereby affecting the fundamental rights of an individual to live or to grow, which is the essence of democracy. Indian politics is largely shaped by the cultural varieties, social, ethnic, caste, community and religious pluralism, the known tradition of the countrywide movement with the contrasting style of party leadership and unique contrasting ideological perspective. For majority of the scholars of politics, namely Myron Weiner India is perhaps the most important of all the newer countries of the so-called “third world” and in view of its long and composite past, its vast population and its present position, the

special value of such a country can be generally identified without doing an injustice to any other country. In every developing political system, two types of politics can be pointed out, the politics of ideology and the politics of action. An analysis of the reciprocal action between the two can throw up some of the most important strands of the essence and direction of political change occurring in such a system. During Vedic period, the system of Varna became the foundation of social stratification and according to this system, there were namely four Varnas like Brahmin, Kshatriya, Baishya, and Sudra where each were assigned with a specific role. However, with the progress of time, the caste system came to the in endowment status, which got resolved by birth and as a result, it has now become a divisive factor in our Indian society today.

Objective of study:

1. To analyze the impact cast on Indian politics.
2. To study the constitutional provisions for casteless society.
3. To provide valuable suggestions.

Role of caste in Indian politics:

The role of caste in Indian Politics can be specially discussed as below:

Caste factor in political socialization and leadership recruitment:

Different caste groups their loyalties behind political parties and their ideologies. Right from his birth an Indian citizen inherits a caste and grows up as a member of particular caste group. He belongs either to one of the high castes or to scheduled castes. In the process of picking up his political orientations, attitudes, and beliefs, he naturally comes under the influence of caste groups and casteism. Caste values and caste interests influence their socialization and consequently their political thinking, conscience, and participation. He bets on caste solidarity to occupy and play a leadership recruiting role. Caste Influences Leadership Recruitment Process. This is particularly true of caste conscious people of States like Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh Reddys, Karmas and Valamas, provide state leaders.

Caste based political parties:

Caste factor is a component of the Indian party system. In India, there are so many caste-based political parties which try to promote and protect the interest of a particular caste. The regional political parties, in particular, stand predominantly influenced by the caste factor. DMK and AIADMK are non-Brahmin and non-Brahmin political parties from Tamil Nadu. In Punjab, Akali Dal has a community identity. It stands influenced by the issue of jats vs. non-jats. All political parties in India use caste as a means for securing votes in elections. BSP banks upon the support of Scheduled Castes while the BJP largely banks upon its popularity among caste Hindu and the trading community.

Caste based pressure groups:

There are so many caste based pressure groups in India which try to promote and protect the interest of particular caste and for this purpose they keep putting pressure on governments the pressure groups like scheduled caste federation, Arya Samaj Sabha, Sanatan Dharam Sabha etc, are such pressure groups Who work for the protection of the interests of a particular community.

Caste and nomination of candidates:

The caste factor is an important determinant of electoral politics in India. While nominating their candidates from different constituencies the political parties keep in mind the cast of candidate and cast of the voters in that particular constituency. As a result of this candidate is sure to get the votes of voters of his caste. In electoral constituencies dominated by Muslims, Muslim candidates are deployed and in areas dominated by Jats, Jat candidates are deployed. Even secularist parties like Congress, Janata Dal, CPI, and CPM take into consideration caste fact in selecting their candidates.

Caste and voting behaviour:

In the election campaigns, votes are demanded in the names of caste. Caste groups are tapped for committed support N.D. Palmer has rightly observed that Caste considerations are given great weight in the selection of candidates and in the appeals to voters during election campaigns. In elections, caste is the most important political party. The Candidates asked for votes in the name of caste and they raise the

caste-based slogan like “jat ki beti jat ko, jat ki vote jat ko”. Such slogans do have an effect on voters and they cast their vote in favour of the candidate belonging to their caste.

Caste as divisive and cohesive force in Indian Politics:

Caste acts as a dividing and cohesive force in Indian politics. It provides a basis for the emergence of several interest groups in the Indian Political System each of which competes with all other groups in the struggle for power. At times it leads to an unhealthy struggle for power and acts as a divisive force however, it is a source of unity among the members of groups and acts as a cohesive force. In rural India, where the social universe of the rural power is limited to an area of 15 to 20 km, caste acts as unifying forces. It is the only social group they understand. Existence of caste groups also leads to factionalism. Caste as such is a factor in Indian politics and it acts as cohesive as well as a divisive factor.

Caste and organization of government:

As caste is an important characteristic of Indian society and acts as a dominant factor in various political processes, it also plays a key role in decision making. Even the issue of re-organization of State was handled with an eye upon the prevention of undue predominance of a caste group in a particular territory. The caste factor affects state government policies and decisions. The ruling party tries to use its decision-making power to win the favour of major caste groups. Congress has always tried to nurture people belonging to Scheduled Castes as its vote banks. Regional political power for furthering the interests of the caste groups which support or can support their regimes. The constitution of India provides for a single unified electorate and advocates the spirit of caste free politics and administration. However, the caste factor always acts as a determinant of people’s voting behaviour, their political participation, the party structure and even of the governmental decision-making.

Caste factor and local governments:

The role of caste in the working of Panchayati Raj and other institutions of local self-government has been recognized reality. Caste-based factionalism in rural areas of India has been the most major hindering factor in the

organization and effective working of Panchayati Raj. In the rural Indian context, the caste was a mobilization of the communication channel, representation, and leadership and a link between the electoral process and the political process

Caste violence:

Caste-based violence often finds its way into politics. The traditional differences between higher and lower castes become vigorous and have turned into a violent and fierce struggle for power in society. The growing terrorization of the lower castes by the higher or even intermediary castes has been becoming a part of rural India’s political reality. In states like Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat and U.P caste violence has raised its head even in some urban areas. However, until today most of the caste-based violence continues to characterize rural politics.

The demand for reservation by other communities:

The provisions of the reservation made in the constitution have proved counterproductive also as the non-scheduled castes, have also started putting pressure on the government to make provisions of reservation for them.

Social and political tensions:

The provisions made for the protection of interests of scheduled castes have also disturbed the social harmony in the Indian society and have created so many social and political tensions. The society has got divided into lower caste and higher caste.

Caste and civil administration:

The bureaucracy also gets influenced by the caste as mostly, the postings, transfers, and appointments of public officials get influenced by the caste considerations. In these days the interest of a particular caste are kept in mind while running the administration.

Caste and formation of a council of ministers:

While constituting the council of ministers prime minister and chief minister have to give representation to the members belonging to different castes in their state and in case they do not do so, the supporters of particular caste put

pressure on the prime minister and chief minister to give representation to their caste.

Caste and Indian Constitution:

1. Acts & Constitutional Provisions for a Casteless Society:

India has one of the best constitutions, but it is rarely fully implemented. The below provisions are the results of the sincere efforts taken by the Great Indians.

- Protection of Civil Rights Act-1976
- Prevention of atrocities against SC & ST's Act -1989

2. Fundamental Rights – First Right is the Right to Equality:

- Article 14 – Equality before the law.
- Article 15 – Prohibition of discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, gender, and colour.
- Article 16 – Equal opportunities in public employment.
- Article 17 – Abolition of untouchability.
- Article 18 – Abolition of titles.

3. Fundamental Duty:

51A- (e), to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood among all the citizens of India irrespective of religion, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities and to renounce practices of defamatory to the dignity of women.

1. Directive Principles of State Policy

- Article 38 – To promote the welfare of the people by securing a social order permeated by justice – social, economic and political – and to minimize inequalities in income, status, facilities, and opportunities.
- Article 46 – To promote the educational and economic interests of SCs, STs and other weaker sections of the society and to save them from social injustice and exploitation.
- Article 330 – Reservation of seats in Lok Sabha for SC and ST's.
- Article 332 – Reservation of Seats in State Assembly for SC and ST's. Measures to be taken:

The caste system cannot be eliminated without changing the mindset of the people. The problem has persisted largely because of the illiteracy and ignorance of the people. Hence they do not accept any social change.

The following points need to be looked for neutralizing the role of caste in Politics:

1. The basis of the reservation should be economic not caste so that all the poor section of society are benefitted to it.
2. Media should play a neutral role.
3. Caste-based violence must be eliminated through well-organized efforts.
4. The recognition of caste-based political parties should be withdrawn.
5. The politician should rise above the politics of caste.
6. The education system should be remodeled on secular lines.
7. All schools must encourage community living by organizing community meals and all students should be included in it.
8. School textbooks should be carefully revised. The study material should teach the students that the caste system is made by man.
9. By promoting Inter-caste Marriage and by providing special offers for people whom do inter-caste marriage can bring changes in the next generation people.

Conclusion:

Lastly concluding, there is a close relationship between caste and politics in India and both influence each other. Caste is an important component of the social system in India has made its special place in the Indian political system at various levels. Casteism is the biggest challenge for Indian democracy. Democracy and Casteism are opposed to each other. India has adopted the liberal democratic system, which is mainly based on equality, freedom, and justice. Caste stands for inequality based on birth. Caste loyalties other ethnic factors really divide the Indian political parties and but not the ideological differences. Election campaigns are conducted along caste lines and violence in polls is usually caste-based violence. Politics has become caste-ridden and castes have got politicized. Caste groups use politics as the means to secure their benefits. The democratization process will bring new leaders from the marginalized communities. People want development and want their voices to listen. The political leaders will have to democratize themselves and try their best to fulfill the basic needs of the common man. American political experts I. Rudolf and S.H. Rudolf in their book "Modernity of Tradition" hold the view that caste politics in India has

reduced the divergence among caste and has brought about political non-discrimination among the members of different castes. Our education system must inculcate the values of equality and fraternal bonds among all the citizens. It is essential for nation-building. The government should ensure that the operation of political practices and system are just and equal to all groups, regions, and communities.

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