



HISTORY OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA AND POLITICIZATION OF CASTE.

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Abstract: Indian civilization is firmly entrenched in the caste system. In India, societal stratification is notably based on caste. Caste-based politics dominate Indian politics. The nature, structure, and operation of political parties, interest groups, and all other political formations and their functions are determined by caste. Caste, religion, class, and other divisions within Indian society make it difficult for parliamentary democracy to function as intended. The main goal of this essay is to examine the role caste plays in Indian politics and how this has led to severe concerns and barriers to national integration. Caste and politics are connected in a very special way.

Keywords: Casteism, hierarchy, leadership, politicization, social stratification.

Introduction: Caste refers to a broad hierarchical institutional arrangement along which basic social factors like birth, marriage, food-sharing, etc. are arranged in a hierarchy of rank and status. These sub-divisions are traditionally linked to occupations and decide the social relation with respect to other upper and lower castes. The traditional hierarchical ordering of castes was based on the distinction between ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’. While the manifestation of the order has changed to a large extent in recent times, the system itself has not changed much. The word ‘Caste’ is derived from the Spanish word caste which means race. People born in a particular race have their separate castes. It defines all social, economic, and political relationships for individuals. Caste determines the nature, organization, and working of political parties, interest groups, and all political structures and their functions. The aim of this paper is to discuss the history of the caste system in India and also analyze the role of caste in Indian politics and how it becomes an obstacle to the true working of parliamentary democracy and to national integration.

Objectives: The objectives of the paper are-

1. To study the history of the caste system in India.
2. To study how the caste concept is politicized in India.

Methodology: The paper is basically a qualitative one and the study is based on secondary sources which include books, research papers, and journal articles.

Review Of Literature: There are extensive literatures available on the caste system in India. Political scientists and research scholars have studied the caste system and the issues related to caste very extensively.

M.N. Srinivasa in his edited book '*Caste: Its 20th Century Avatar*' discusses very deeply about the Indian caste structure from the very past. The origin of caste system Indian, crucial role of caste in socio-political context, lower caste people's lives and their occupations which are based on their caste.

Dr. B.R Ambedkar defines caste system as graded inequality. In his book '*Annihilation of Caste*' he discusses the very caste structure of Hindu society.

Rajesh Ranjan in the edited book "*Caste system and social evil*" discusses about the varna and jati system in ancient India. He describes that since British society was divided by class, the British attempted to equate the Indian caste system to their own social class system.

Ranjan describes that the British saw caste as an indicator of occupation, social standing, and intellectual ability. According to the Ranjan, the caste system became more rigid during the British Raj.

G.S Ghurey stated in his book "*Caste and Race*" that the major characteristics of caste are segmental division, hierarchical division restrictions on feeding/ social intercourse, ritual status of a caste, lack of instructed choice of occupation and restricted on marriage.

According to Ghurey, caste hierarchy is based on purity and pollution and socio-economic factors play a secondary role.

Discussion:

Caste is a social stratification system that is a salient feature of Indian society that has influenced the structure of society in socio-economic and political scenarios. Caste values and interests have an impact on people's political awareness and engagement. The process of political socialization of caste causes a rise in caste consciousness among the populace. Political parties consider both the caste of the candidates and the caste of the voters in each constituency when announcing their nominees for office. It then has an impact on the democratic principles of justice and equality. Most of the times it leads to an unhealthy

struggle for power and acts as a divisive force. However, the existence of caste politics has also contributed to the advancement of socially excluded groups. Even if caste politics are still widely practiced in India, this does not necessarily mean that it is the best approach to advance the interests of underprivileged and marginalized groups.

Caste considerations dominate people's lives from birth to death (Sayeed,2007). The caste system in India was historically justified by traditional Hindu holy literature, particularly as understood by Brahmans. Without any mention of the caste system in the Vedas, the Vedic people would not have approved of it. The *Purushu Sukta*, included in the 10th Mandala of the Rigveda, explains how the castes were created: from various portions of the Purusha, the Cosmic Soul, after a major sacrifice made by the gods. According to religious traditions, the primordial man, Purush, destroyed himself in order to create a new being, as stated in the ancient Hindu text known as the Rig Veda. The four distinct varnas were developed from the various body components of that person. The Shudras came from his feet, the Vaishyas from his thighs, the Kshatriyas from his hands, and the Brahmins from his head.

However, historically, the caste system is said to have started with the arrival of the Aryans in India in approximately 1500 BC. The literary records of the Indo-Aryan culture are not the earliest of the several cultures that thrived in India. However, they do include first a description of the components of the caste system and its ongoing history. The Varna Vyavastha, a specific social organizing system, belonged to the Aryans. This was founded on society's four hierarchical functional divisions. In order to secure their status, the Aryans laid out social and religious rules which stated that only they were allowed to become priests, warriors, and businessmen of the society. In the times of Aryans skin colour is also a determining factor in the caste system.

Many members of the lower castes who had grown weary of being oppressed resorted to Buddhism about the sixth century. Buddhism really got its start as a response against Hindu society's harshness, which included the caste system's brutality. Buddhism focuses on the person rather than the society, distancing religion from the goals of the powerful and privileged. One is no longer born into a position because of previous injustice in Buddhism. Buddhism does view life as being filled with misery and suffering, and reincarnation is seen as a continuation of this pain, although there may be a way out. The Buddha, who was a member of the warrior caste by birth, was a fierce opponent of the caste system. Buddhism categorically condemns any caste system.

The entrance of the British had an impact on the caste system's flexibility. As Christians, the British brought their own established system of administration and did not share much of the same sentiment for the Hindu institutions. Caste advantages and practices were promoted in the early years of the British East India Company's reign, but later British law courts started to object to the discrimination against the lower castes. But British practices of "divide and rule" helped to strengthen caste identities.

CASTE: AN INSTRUMENT OF POLITICS

The 'caste factor' has been playing a pivotal role in different aspects of Indian society. Political parties, administration, government, etc. are part of society and therefore would indeed influence by caste. Politics and caste both influence each other. Caste plays a dominant role in different political processes. The influence of caste on politics is visible in many ways.

Caste is the determining factor in India's political development (Sayeed, 2007). From nominating a candidate in an electoral constituency to the implementation of governmental policies, the impact of caste factor is overtly visible (Desai, 1967). However, the influence of caste on politics varies from state to state based on its development (Desai, 1967). Besides, people from some smaller caste like Brahmin, Bania, Kayastha etc. are do get elected and therefore, caste might not be the single prominent factor in electoral politics for all the times (Desai, 1967).

The political parties of India have direct or indirect linkages to caste (Kaur, 2018). In many aspects 'caste angle' has become a pivotal factor of consideration before election for political parties in India including the secular parties like Janata Dal, CPI, CPM etc (Kaur,2018). The political parties always consider the caste factor before providing ticket to contest in an electoral constituency (Chapaitkar, 2013). Even, during campaigning, votes are demanded on the basis of caste with slogans like 'Jat ki beti Jat ko; Jat ki vote Jat ko' (Chapaitar, 2013).

In many states, one or two castes dominate politics and political, for instances, the Reddys in Andhra Pradesh, Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka, Marathas in Maharashtra, and so on (Sayeed,2007). Electoral politics in general and distribution of tickets during elections in particular are based on caste calculations and vote banks for instances Muslim and Harijan vote banks which have been the stronghold of the Congress (Sayeed,2007).

Even, during the formation Council of Ministers, the leader of the party has to ensure the equal representation of different caste in the state. Moreover, the voting behaviour of individuals are also influenced by the caste angle. Many a time it has been seen that, people cast vote to the candidate belongs to their caste as they believe that the candidate from their own caste will put effort to promote and protect the caste interest (Desai, 1967). Besides, people consider political parties as ladder to ensure direct participation in government or governmental policies (Desai, 1967).

However, caste based politics, in a way though give an opportunity to deprived section of people to represent their community; at the same time it can led to a unhealthy struggle for power (Kaur, 2018). Crime against the historically marginalised scheduled castes and schedule tribes by the upper caste represents an extreme form of prejudice and discrimination. Similar to the hate crime in other parts of the world, these groups have remained target to the crimes and atrocities at the hands of the upper caste people mainly on account of their low caste identity in the form of rape, abuse by the police personnel, harassment, illegal land encroachments, forced evictions and so on. The growing terrorisation 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, Haryana, Rajasthan and Utter Pradesh caste violence has raised its head even in some urban areas.

Conclusion: Similar to how religion divides people, politicians frequently utilize caste as a wedge issue. Numerous political parties use caste prejudice and splinter society in order to profit from these divisions. The political leaders appeal to the sentiments of the voters of their respective caste groups and try to mobilise votes on that basis so as to capture and retain political power. The politicians also manage to divert the attention of its voters from issues relating to development etc. by engaging them in caste related issues. The politicians often hijack the development oriented issues from the common masses and try to mislead the people by unnecessary issues. Over the years the negative role of caste has found prominence in Indian politics and considered one of the dangerous unhealthy trends towards our democracy more important on Inclusive development. There is a close relationship between caste and politics in India and both influence each other.

Therefore, it follows from the explanation above that casteism poses the greatest threat to Indian democracy. Casteism and democracy are incompatible. The liberal democratic system,

which is primarily founded on justice, equality, and freedom, has been accepted by India. Caste represents birth-based inequality that is arbitrarily upheld on the basis of some harmful practices. since castes have gotten politicized and politics has become caste-ridden. Caste groups rely on politics to secure their benefits.

Caste is only an identity mark. It shouldn't have an excessive amount of importance in our lives and relationships. The blind passion for caste and casteism must be replaced by faith in social, economic, and justice. Caste-based political parties should no longer be recognized. The politician should transcend caste-based politics. The basis of reservation should be economic not caste so that all poor sections of society are benefited to it. For perfect integration of everyone as equal partners in nation development, our educational system must instill in all young men and women the principles of equality and fraternal ties. The government should make sure that the political system and procedures are fair and equal to all communities, organizations, and religions.

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