

CASTE AND CLASS IN THE INDIAN POLITICS

INTRODUCTION:-

Aristotle has stated, “man is a political animal because he is a social creature with the power of speech and moral reasoning”. Moreover, the social contract theory of jurisprudence states that the people live together in society in accordance with an agreement that establishes moral and political rules of behavior. Moreover, Politics is a notion generally applied to the science of government and running governmental or state affairs, including behavioral ethics within civil governments, and other institutions, and fields, such as the corporate, academic, and religious segments of society. The political processes, generally, ascended out of the social environments, consisting of, class, caste, tribes, clans, etc.

In India also, the caste system is a predominant aspect of the social and political structure, because of the multi-religiosity, and multi-ethnicity that exist. However, the influence of class and caste is so prevailing in our political setup that it, sometimes, imposes the question regarding its significance in a democracy like India. An analysis of post-electoral surveys for national and state elections from 1962–2014 concludes that the main driver of voter choice during this period was caste and religious identification.

WHAT DOES CASTE MEAN-?

Caste is the foundation of social stratification in India; it defines all social, economic, and political relationships for the individual. Indian

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society has been highly segmented along the lines of castes, religion, class, etc, it eventually prevents the true working of Parliamentary democracy. As far as the political structure is concerned, caste determines the nature, organization, and working of political parties, interest groups, and all political structures and their functions.

CASTE VS. POLITICAL SYSTEM: -

Ideologically, caste and democratic political systems signify opposite value systems. Caste is hierarchical; whereas, our political system should be based on democratic ethos i.e. equitable representation. Conventionally, upper castes had been given certain privileges not only in the social sphere but also in the economic, education and political spheres. On the contrary, the democratic political system, under the Indian Constitution, backs freedom to an individual and equality of status; it stands for the Rule of Law.

There are three consequences of such interaction between caste associations and political parties:

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- Firstly, caste members, particularly the poor and marginalized ones, who previously remained untouched by the political processes got politicized and began to participate in electoral politics with an expectation that their interests would be served.
- Secondly, caste members get split among various political parties weakening the hold of the caste. And,
- Lastly, numerically large castes get representation in decision-making bodies and the strength of the traditionally dominant castes gets weakened. This explains the rise of middle and backward caste representations in most of the state assemblies.

The interaction between caste and politics is analyzed at two levels:

1. How caste affects politics; and
2. How politics affects caste.

The interest and mindfulness of various castes in politics may be studied in terms of four factors: interest of castes in politics, political knowledge and political awareness of castes, identification of castes with political parties, and influence of castes on political affairs. Majorly, three factors, such as education, government patronage, and slowly expanding franchises have entered the caste system because of which the

caste system has come to affect democratic politics in the country.

Economic opportunity, administrative patronage, and positions of power offered by the new institutions and the new leadership drew castes into politics. This involvement of castes in politics resulted in two things:

1. The caste system made available to the leadership the structural and the ideological basis for political mobilization, and
2. The leadership was enforced to make concessions to local opinion and organize castes for economic and political purposes.

THE EVOLUTION OF CASTE POLITICS IN INDIA: -

Indian Constitution, under Article 17, abolishes untouchability; moreover, in 1976, the Protection of Civil Rights Act was enacted to preserve the interests of various castes, and the provisions for the reservation of seats are some of the factor, which ultimately resulted in the furtherance of the concretization of caste. Caste and casteism never disappeared in India. Post-Mandal Commission regime, the prevalence of caste in the politics has started seeing more clearly.

ROLE OF THE CASTE IN INDIAN POLITICS: -

Caste factor in Political Socialization and

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Leadership Recruitment: -

The group identity based on caste that has been reinforced by the advent of political consciousness around caste identities is institutionalized by the caste-based political parties that acknowledge upholding and protecting the interests of specific identities including the castes. Different caste groups their loyalties behind political parties and their ideologies. Caste influences Leadership Recruitment Process. This is particularly true of caste conscious people of States like Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh. For instance, in the state of Andhra Pradesh Reddys, Karmas and Valamas, provide state leaders.

CASTE BASED POLITICAL PARTIES:

Caste factor is a prime component of the Indian political 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 evolution of the regional political parties, particularly, stands predominantly influenced by the caste factor. The DMK and AIADMK, the political parties from Tamil Nadu stood on the verge of Brahmin-non-Brahmin debate. In Punjab, Akali Dal has a community identity as 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. Subsequently, political parties have the upper caste dominated BJP, the lower caste

dominated BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party), or the SP (Samajwadi Party), including the fact that left parties have implicitly followed the caste pattern to extract distance in electoral politics.

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 the Scheduled Caste Federation, Arya Samaj Sabha, Sanatan Dharam Sabha etc., are some of the pressure groups, which 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 caste of candidate and the caste of the voters in that particular constituency. As a result of this candidate is sure to get the votes of voters of his caste. Here, it is not needed to say that several times the political parties have chosen their Presidential candidates on the basis of their caste.

CASTE AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR: -

In the election campaigns, the votes are demanded in the names of caste, though it is not permitted as per the existing Election

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Law in India . Caste considerations are given great weight in the selection of candidates and in the appeals to voters during election campaigns. The Candidates, directly, or indirectly, ask for votes in the name of caste by raising caste-based slogans.

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 reorganization of State was handled with an eye upon the prevention of undue predominance of a caste group in a particular territory. The ruling party tries to use its decision-making power to win the favour of major caste groups. Regional political power for furthering the interests of the caste groups, which support or can support their regimes.

The Constitution of India, under Article 324, 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 the Panchayati Raj and other institutions (PRIs)

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 the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

CASTE VIOLENCE:

In May 2021, the caste-based violence post the Assembly election in West Bengal, wherein the person from the Scheduled Caste have been murdered and raped show another dark side of the caste and class based politics.

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 other states also like Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, caste violence has raised in the election.

CASTE AND INDIAN LEGAL REGIME: -

Indian Constitution: -

India has the Constitution, which is egalitarian, and equitable in nature. There are several provisions in the Constitution to preserve the unity, and fraternity:

1. Fundamental Rights –

- a. Article 14 – Equality before the law, and equal protection of law.
- b. Article 15 – Prohibition of discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, gender, and colour.
- c. Article 16 – Equal opportunities in

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public employment.

- d. Article 17 – Abolition of untouchability.
- e. Article 18 – Abolition of titles.

2. Fundamental Duty:

- a. Article 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.
- 3. Directive Principles of State Policy
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
- 4. Other Provisions: -
 - a. Article 327 and 328 of the Constitution confers the power on parliament and state legislature respectively to make rules for election to Parliament and state legislature.
 - b. Article 330 – Reservation of seats in Lok Sabha for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
 - c. Article 332 – Reservation of Seats in

State Assembly for SC and ST's.

The Representation of Peoples' Act 1950: -

1. Section 123 of the Act provides for the corrupt practices, which is a ground of disqualification of candidates and legislators.
2. Sub-Section (3) of this provisions states that the appeal by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent to vote or refrain from voting for any person on the ground of his religion, race, caste, community or language or the use of, or appeal to religious symbols or the use of, or appeal to, national symbols, such as the national flag or the national emblem, for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of that candidate or for prejudicially affecting the election of any candidate, are considered as corrupt practices.
3. In *Abhiram Singh v. CD Coomachen* (2017), a seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court held that this provision extended to the voter and that appeals cannot be made on the basis of the identities of either the candidate or the voters.

WAY FORWARD: -

1. Reservation policy should be changed:
 - The basis of the reservation should be economic not caste so that all the poor section of society are benefitted to it.

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Moreover, the governments need to understand the politics on the basis of caste, class and class-based reservation is harmful for the democracy in the long run.

2. **Role of Media:** Media should play a neutral role. Media, being, the fourth pillar of the democracy should understand its duty towards the establishment of democratic society by uncovering the casteist masks of the candidates, and refraining from publishing any such content to promote casteism, or class-division in the political set-up.
3. **Law should be strengthened:** Caste-based violence must be eliminated through well-organized efforts. The law should be implemented in harmonious and stringent manner to curb such instances.
4. **Election Commission should be Empowered** The recognition of caste-based political parties should be withdrawn. The ECI should be given the authority for the same.
5. **Sensitization of the Politicians and Candidates:** The politician should rise above the politics of caste. The role of ethics in the politics should be enhanced.
6. **Secular Model of Education:** The education system should be remodeled on secular lines. All schools must encourage community living by organizing community meals and all students should

be included in it. School textbooks should be carefully revised. The study material should teach the students that the caste system is made by man.

ROLE OF THE JUDICIARY: NEED REJUVENATION: -

It is emphasised that the Supreme Court must change its approach with respect to reservation and see things from the perspectives of the backward classes. It must not become privy to the arbitrary actions of the government. It must realise that it cannot shy away from its role in bringing about equality and social justice. History tells us that when oppression reaches its highest point, the oppressed feel compelled to resist to survive and regain their dignity. Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar' writes in Kurukshetra:

**Nyaya shanti ka pratham nyas hai
 Jab tak nyaya na aata
 Jaisa bhi ho mahal shanti ka
 Sudridh nahin rah pata**

**(Justice is the foundation of peace,
 Where people are deprived of justice,
 The structures of so-called peace
 Do not last much longer.)**

CONCLUSION:-

There is a Hindi saying that reads 'jati nahi jat', which means the caste will persist in

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our society. But what we can do and should work upon is to eradicate and annihilate the impact of caste, class, religion, etc. in the politics. People, from all the strata of the society, 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. It is our duty to ensure that the operation of political practices and system are just and equal to all groups, regions, and communities. Voters should be encouraged to discuss development issues that matter to them and also to vote along the lines of development rather than caste.

