

## Caste Politics in India



Rupesh Kumar  
M.A. Political Science  
Jamia Millia Islamia,  
New Delhi, India

### ABSTRACT

Caste is an integral part of Indian society. Caste is almost present in every political and social process in India. Caste has played both integrative and disintegrative role in Indian society. Identity politics has led to emergence of caste in electoral politics. Some scholars see rise of caste in political process as a factor which has strengthened the democracy in India, because a large section of people come out to cast their votes to support their candidates who belongs to their caste. Caste based politics gave voices to those section of people who were underrepresented. While on the other hand many scholars see caste as a disintegrative factor for long term development of Indian society. They are opined of instead of caste, development should be an integrative factor in Indian political system. It is reality of our Indian societies that caste has deeply rooted in almost every aspect of our life. Many political parties have been emerged along the caste lines. Their whole politics is based on their caste group instead of developmental politics. Our many public policies are caste driven, while at same time we are trying to make caste free Indian societies. In contemporary time in electoral politics caste has entrenched too much. Political parties give ticket to candidates keeping the caste equations. Even the composition of council of ministers are formed along keeping all type of caste calculated cost-benefit. Dr. Ambedkar in a constituent assembly debate had said that caste is not a positive factor for development of Indian societies.

**Keywords:** Politicisation of Caste, Democratic Values, Instability, Vote Bank Politics.

---

### INTRODUCTION

It is said that Indians do not cast their votes, they vote their caste. Christophe Jaffrelot writes caste forms the mosaic of Indian politics. Caste word has been derived from the Portuguese word *casta* which means pure race. There is no exact translation of word *jaati* in English word. Caste is hereditary determined, it comes attached with birth. Caste has become the essence of Indian society. Caste system is based on the purity and pollution concept. Caste system is not only present in Hindu but it also crept into Muslims, Christians, Sikhs. Caste is so deep rooted in Indian society, caste has become essential features of Indian societies. It has become identity of Indian society.

Indian society are mainly divided in four varnas these are Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra. Within a varna there are different castes. There are different perspectives regarding origin of caste system in India Manu Smriti writes all four varnas are born from different body parts of a virat purush (Lord Brahma) . Brahmin originated from mouth of Brahma who performs the functions of priest and teachers. Kshatriya was born from arm of Lord Brahma ,who is a warrior class. Vaishya was born from thigh of Lord Brahma who is a merchant and traders class. Shudras was born from feet, who are peasants and labourers and those who did not come under above mentioned four varnas they were untouchables. If anyone come in contact with untouchables they were considered polluted.

Mahatma Gandhi is of opinion that originally varna system was based on functional specialisation and there was mobility among varnas, but at the time of moral degradation of Hinduism caste discrimination like concept of untouchable entered.

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar writes about the origin of caste system is a conspiracy of Brahmin class against rebel Kshatriya class who challenged the hegemony of Brahmin, few among Kshatriya are Gautam Buddha and Jainism like Mahavir Jain. To separate them Brahminism started upnayan and became vegetarian as a symbol of purity and started discrimination against those who did not perform upnayan and eating meat . this division became very deep in hundreds of years and practise of discrimination against lower caste by upper caste became a part of caste system.

### **CASTE AS INTEGRATIVE AND DISINTEGRATIVE FORCE IN POLITICS**

Different scholars have worked on caste system in India like Louis Dumont. He treats caste and class two different things. Dumont writes class of a person is determined by their economic status, education, power. He says caste is based on birth whereas class is based on worth and merit. Caste is a rigid system,whereas there is mobility in class

M.N.Srinivas challenged Louis Dumont's view that caste and class is two different things. M.N.Srinivas is of opinion that there is not much difference between caste and class. Class is also rigid and based on birth . he gave the concept of dominant caste . According to him dominant caste are those caste which have numerical majority and ownership of land. Many OBCs are dominant caste .There are different dominant caste in different regions for example Yadav in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Marathas in Maharashtra, Reddys, Kammas and kapus in Andhra, Lingayat and Vokkaligas in Karnataka, Jats in Haryana.

Caste was also a prime factors in politics even before independence. There were many parties which were represented different castes like congress was considered party of upper caste like Brahmin, and Vaishyas. Republican party of India was representing the Dalits. DMK was party of OBC of South India.

Pandit Nehru held that casteism and communalism are the greatest threat for integrity of India. Nehru tried his best to suppress the casteism and communalism, but he could not get success. One reason of this was in

Indian constitution many articles and provisions were solely based on caste particularly the affirmative action( reservation )mentioned in the constitution. This affirmative actions lead to emergence of consciousness of caste identity. Andre Betille observed that at one side Nehru asks about eradication of caste identity from societies while on the other hand he included caste in his policy of governance.

On the other hand scholars like Rajni Kothari see caste in positive sense, caste as an instrument to bring positive changes in some sections of society particularly among Other Backward Class and scheduled caste . He sees caste as a factor which has strengthened democracy in India. On the basis of caste people are mobilised. India is a prismatic society where caste has been an integrative force .In India where a section is illiterate, they do not understand the essence and purpose of election but they come out to cast their vote for their candidate who belong to their caste.

Prof. Yogendra Yadav also thinks that caste has strengthened the Indian democracy. He considers caste behind the democratic upsurge. As consciousness of caste identity increased among people. It makes them more aware about their caste, they started using their caste as an assertive identity. Many caste groups have formed their political parties on the basis of political equations. Caste became prevalent in later phase more particularly after 1980s.

After implementation of Mandal Commission Report a new section strongly emerged,it was Other Backward Class. It led to division of Hindus castes, in response to this BJP tried to consolidated Hindus on basis of politics of Hindutva. This party started Rath Yatra from Somnath to Gujarat, which ultimately lead to demolition of Babri Mosque.

Many regional parties were solely formed on the basis of caste equations like in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh the combination of Muslim and Yadav (MY Equation) led to the formation of government by Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar respectively some other caste equations were made by regional parties in other different state of India to come power.Coalition like AJGAR (Ahir,Jaat,Gurjar,Rajput) by Sir Chottu Ram, later on by Choudhary Charan Singh. This is how politics of caste has integrated different caste, which could not be integrated by social reformers of India .

Many scholars did not see caste as a positive factors for development of Indian societies in long term. C.P.Bhambri is of opined if one political parties tries to mobilise voters on caste lines then other political parties try to mobilise voters on religious line and this ultimately leads to disintegration of societies. Example of this is, after implementation of Mandal Commission,V.P.Singh tried to make vote bank politics of other backward class ,in response to Mandal Commission,BJP started the issue of Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Other negative factor of caste based politics is that political parties easily manipulate voters by emotional appeal to caste vote in their favours. Political parties know that, they are going to get votes on caste based pattern so they don't care much for development, they are busy only in making caste equation at the time of election. Voters also strongly associate themselves with the caste of contesting candidates. It reduces the accountability of representative, because they think that they can win by consolidating votes of some caste, so

they do not pay attention on development. Other negative aspect related to caste politics is that it also brings instability in government. Many times due to some caste issues, ministers from that particular caste gives resign to show solidarity with people of his or her caste and vote bank politics, it may bring instability in government particularly in coalition government. Within, political parties ,many important posts of party are given, in keeping caste of post bearer in background.

Election commission is responsible to conduct free and fair election. There are many provisions in The Representation of People Act 1951, and Model code of conduct which prohibit candidate to ask voters to give votes in the name of caste and religion. In reality there are many loopholes in these provisions .It has failed to curb the menace of political parties from manipulation of voters' caste in election. There is urgent need to address the loopholes of The Representation of People Act 1951 along with new laws to prevent use of caste in elections.

## **CONCLUSION**

Caste has deeply rooted in our societies. Too much assertive on caste based identity politics is certainly going to hamper our development, instead of strengthening our democracies . Caste based electoral politics kill the spirit of democratic values. Caste based politics may lead to hatred in our societies among different caste group of societies. Political Parties always tries to get benefit by manipulating the voters. We should not forget what Dr.Ambedkar has written in his book Annihilation of Caste .He writes caste has killed the public spirit. Caste has taken away the sense of charity .caste has made public opinion impossible , virtue has become caste ridden, morality has become caste bound, this is what we feel today in caste ridden societies. This is very sad thing that role of caste is increasing day by day. Caste and politics both influences each other. This will certainly going to be a hurdle for our country's development. There is need to give value education to children so that in future they will not give undue importance to their caste. Increasing literacy rate of people will also help in reducing the values of caste in societies. There is need of awareness among voters to prevent their manipulation during time of election by candidates and political parties. It is also expected from political parties that they should not see election as an opportunity to gain power by winning through any immoral means. Political parties should not forget what Mahatma Gandhi has said that politics should not be separated from ethics. Elected representatives must think that they are representative of people, if they do politics of caste for power game ,then he or she is not doing justice with themselves and people, and ultimately weakening the democracy of India. We must strive to save idea of India.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1]. Fadia,B.L, Indian government and Politics, Sahitya Bhawan Publication,2010
- [2]. Kothari,Rajni, Caste in Indian Politics , Orient Blackswan Publication ,2010
- [3]. Kothari,Rajni, Politics In India , Orient Blackswan Publication,2012
- [4]. Kothari,Rajni, Politics and People:In search of a humane india,Apex Prs publisher,1989
- [5]. Rudolph,L.I, & Rudolph,S.H, The modernity of Tradation:Political development in india , University of Chicago Press ,1967

- [6]. Yadav, Yogendra, Suri,K.C, Shastri,Sandeep ,Electoral Politics in India Loksabha Elections in 2004 and Beyond ,Oxford Publication ,2009
- [7]. Jaffrelot,Christophie, The Caste based mosaic of Indian Politics, Seminar,University Of Toronto Press ,2012
- [8]. Ambedkar,Dr.B.R, Annihilation of Caste, Rupa Publication, 2015
- [9]. Ambedkar,Dr.B.R.,Who were Shudras, GautamBook Centre,2017
- [10].Frankel,R.Francine, Hasan,Zoya, Arora,Balveer, Bhargava,Rajeev, Transforming India, Oxford Publication ,2000
- [11].Palshikar,Suhas, Suri,K.C, Yadav,Yogendra Party Competition and Indian States , Oxford Press 2014
- [12].Dumont,Louis,Homo Hierarchicus:The Caste System and Its implications, University of Chicago,1981
- [13].Dumobt,Louis, Religion, Politics and History in India,Collected Papers in Indian Sociology,Cambridge University Press,1970