

Phases of Caste Identities in Indian Politics

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary Indian politics by the virtue of interplay and mutual dynamics of caste and politics today we witness a dual process of politicization of caste and casteization of politics both of which have deeply embedded the caste consciousness in the modern Indian minds through the process of political socialization caste identity have become the part of greater political culture of Indian polity and state.

Keywords :- Caste, Politics, Phases.

Caste has been conventionally conceived as an insulated system of ritual status hierarchy embedded in the perennial religious culture of India. Modernization of India's economy and democratization of its political institution have released new economic and political power in the society. The hierarchically ordered strata of caste now functioned as horizontal groups, competing for power and resources in society. So, the caste system which has prevailed as a socio-political system all through pre-British period to British imperialism and to the modern democratic India has not been similar. It has undergone transformations under changing political scenario and also under the pressure brought about by the forces of larger historical changes such as urbanization, modernization and secularization. The transformation in caste structure as well as caste consciousness in the form of a perpetual process has political, regional, economic and social ramifications. So in my essay I will illuminate the changing nature of caste system, caste identity, and more specifically caste consciousness through all the above mentioned perspectives and this will marshal in evidence to prove that caste identities have actually strengthened in India.

Historical transformation of caste- from a traditional social organization of ancient India to its democratic incarnation in modern India

Phase 1 1800-1900

Lloyd L Rudolph in his article 'The Modernity of Tradition :The Democratic Incarnation of Caste published in 1965 analyses the role of British imperialism which transformed Indian society from an organization of diffused, decentralized micro-level institutions to more centralized organization of macro level institutions this transformation which was brought about by introduction of railways ,postage, telegraph, cheaper paper and printing specially in regional languages have led to greater mobility and communication between same caste of different regions and also among different caste have led to a greater induction of caste consciousness also this new emergent caste consciousness when reacted with new economic opportunities brought about by British rule led to frictions among different caste groups in the political realm which induced a more vigorous manifestation of caste identities in the socio economic and political system .

The Non Brahmin social movement against Brahminical supremacy and oppression in context of British rule and western liberal rationalist ideology of non-Brahmin caste provides another manifestation of caste into politics which led to deepening of caste identities in India. The establishment of Satya Sodhak Samaj by Jyoti Rao Phule in Poona in 1873 provided socio-political platform and leadership to non-Brahmin caste of Maharashtra to struggle against caste oppression

Phase 2: 1900 to 1947

The British started caste based affirmative action programs in the late 19th century in the field of education and administration. By that time the untouchables- who had been known as Depressed classes – has been rechristened Scheduled caste(SC) and the list of the jati belonging to this category which had been established in order to reserve access to the quotas to the relevant beneficiaries was updated in the relevant schedule. The later quota was increased to the level- 12.5 percent in June 1946 which means the proportionality became the rule. Caste based reservations have been instrumental in transforming caste into interest groups . The rise of non- Brahmanical parties in the early 20th century and their later alignment with the regional politics of the geographical south of India is the another stage in the process of deepening of caste identities in India. In erstwhile Madras the extreme non brahmin communities under the leadership of Shree E V Ramaswamy Naicker popularly known as "Periyar" joined the

Dravida Kzhagam, a militant, atheistic, anti-Aryan anti north Indian, anti-Hindi, and anti-Brahmin movement. Present day DMK and AIADMK both of which are major political parties of south India are actually break away factions of early DK.

Phase 3-1947 to contemporary times

Congress after independence emerge as the natural representative of the masses largely because of the role that it had played in the National movement. Through its well-developed 'congress system' it ensures the allegiance of all caste groups. Congress was not associated with any caste group in particular was evident from the over-representation among its voter of categories that were situated at the two poles of the social hierarchy, the upper caste at the top and Dalits at the bottom of the pyramid. The state of affairs was one the reason why Paul Brass described the congress sociology as relying on a coalition of 'extremes' in Uttar Pradesh the state where this arrangement was evident. The congress started to decline in the second half of 1980s because in post Mandal period various regional political parties emerge claiming to be the true representative of certain caste groups, prominent among them was SP, BSP, RJD etc. in North India. Leaders of these parties at times intentionally gave hate speeches against the upper caste in order to strengthened their base in the caste which they claimed to represent. It was the caste based politics of the regional parties which was said to be the major reason behind the continuous formation of coalition government at the centre. The 2014 general election which gave an absolute majority to BJP gave the impression that BJP has defied the caste based politics of the country, however a closer analysis reveal that apart from its development plank it was the caste centred management of the election is the major reason behind its success. In Uttar Pradesh BJP got success largely because it has succeeded in bringing Yadav minus OBC and Jatav minus Dalit into their fold.

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