



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 analyse the role caste in Indian politics and how it becomes a major cause of serious concern and become an obstacle to the national integration.

Key words: Caste, Class, Politics, Party, Society.

I. Introduction

In contemporary Indian scenario, caste mobilisation has become an important factor in determining Indian politics. According to Risley Caste, is a collection of families bearing a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, divine or human and professing to follow same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community. It is described caste as localized group having a traditional association based on one's birth in a caste, though at times associated with particular occupation (N.D. Arora, 2010). Caste, through a joint effort of its members to assert themselves, has presently intervened in both politics and administration mainly through franchise and institutions like Panchayati Raj. Whether it is the factionalism of Indian political parties or the nomination of candidates and the mode of election campaign, most things can be explained through caste interests and caste balance.

The caste system, which is based on the philosophies of purity and pollution, hierarchy and difference, has despite social mobility, been overbearing towards the Shudras and the outcastes who suffered the disgrace of ritual impurity and lived in abject poverty, illiteracy and denial of political power. The basis of confrontational identity politics based on caste may be said to have its origin on the issue of providing the oppressed caste groups with state support in the form of protective discrimination. This group identity based on caste that has been reinforced by the advent of political consciousness around caste identities is institutionalised by the caste-based political parties that acknowledge to uphold and protect the interests of specific identities including the castes. Subsequently, political parties have the upper caste dominated BJP, the lower caste dominated BSP (Bhaujan 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. The Aggregate result of the politicisation can be precised by arguing that caste-based identity politics has had a twin role in Indian society and polity. It comparatively democratised the caste-based Indian society but simultaneously destabilised the development of class-based organisations.

Historical data indicated that Caste-based discrimination and domination have been a malicious aspect of Indian society and after independence, its implications with politics have not only made it possible for previously oppressed caste-groups to be accorded political freedom and recognition but has also raised consciousness about its potential as a political capital. In fact, Dipankar Gupta has emotionally exposed this ambiguity when he elaborates the differences between Ambedkar and Mandal Commission's view of caste. While the former designed the policy of reservations or protective discrimination to remove untouchability as an institution from Indian social life and polity, the latter considered caste as an important political resource. Actually, the Mandal commission can be regarded as the intellectual inspiration in transforming caste based identity to an asset that may be used as a basis for safeguarding political and economic gains. Though it can also be said that the upper castes by virtue of their major position were already occupying positions of strengths in the political and economic system, and when the Mandal intensified the consciousness of the 'Dalits' by recognising their disadvantage of caste-identity as an advantage the confrontation ensues.

II. Objective

- To what extent and in what ways caste influences politics;
- Interrelationship between caste and politics; and
- How politics influences caste.

The role of caste in the Indian political system can be specifically discussed as under:

(1) Caste Factor in Political Socialisation and Leadership Recruitment:

Different caste groups have their loyalties behind different political parties and their ideologies. Right from his birth, an Indian citizen inherits a caste and grows up as a member of a 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, attitude and beliefs, he naturally comes under the influence of caste groups and casteism. 'Caste values' and caste interests influence his socialisation and consequently his political thinking, awareness and participation. He banks upon caste solidarity for occupying and performing a leadership role. Caste influences the process of leadership recruitment. This is particularly true of highly 'caste conscious' people of some states like Haryana, Bihar, UP, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. In Haryana, the leadership comes either from the Jats or from the Bishnois or Brahmins. In Andhra Pradesh, the Reddys, Kammas and Valamas provide state leaders.

(2) Caste and Party Politics:

Caste factor is a constituent of the Indian party system. Some political parties have a direct caste basis while others indirectly bank upon particular caste groups. In particular, the regional political parties stand predominantly influenced by the caste factor. The DMK and AIADMK are non-Brahmin rather anti-Brahmin political parties of Tamil Nadu. In Punjab, Akali Dal has a community panthic identity but 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. While the BSP banks upon the support of the Scheduled Castes, the BJP largely banks upon its popularity among the high caste Hindus and the trading community. In fact, while formulating its policies and decisions each political party of India in India almost always keeps in vision the 'Caste Angle'.

(3) Caste and Elections:

The caste factor is an important factor of electoral politics in India. All political parties give great weightage to the caste factor in selecting their candidates, in allocating constituencies to their candidates and in canvassing support for their nominees in the election. In constituencies predominated by Muslims, Muslim candidates are fielded and in areas predominated by Jats, Jat candidates are fielded. Even avowedly secularist parties like the Congress, the Janata Dal, the CPI and the CPM take into consideration the caste factor in selecting their candidates. In the election campaigns, votes are demanded in the name of caste. Caste groups are tapped for committed support. No one can disagree with N.D. Palmer when he observes that "Caste considerations are given great weight in the selection of candidates and in the appeals to voters during election campaigns." In elections, caste acts as the most important political party.

(4) Caste as a Divisive and Cohesive Factor of Indian Politics:

Caste acts both as a divisive and cohesive force in Indian politics. It provides a basis for the emergence of several interest groups in the Indian system each of which competes with every other group in the struggle for power. At times it leads to unhealthy struggle for power and acts as a divisive force. However, it is a source of unity among the members of various 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 a unifying force. It is the only social group they understand. However, the existence of two or three big caste groups also leads to factionalism. Caste as such is a strong factor in Indian politics and it acts as a cohesive as well as a divisive factor.

III. Conclusion

In the end of this research paper we can say that caste is very deep rooted in Indian social structure and played a major role in politics. From party formation to decision making, it becomes very important. After the introduction of Adult Franchise, every vote becomes very important and each party tried to influence more and more voters. Now a day's caste become more important for politics and politics also becomes more important for caste. Sometime political parties increase this caste system by using caste based slogans and other thing. It destroyed the social harmony and created violence in society. To the development of society it is very important to remove casteism. Government should try to remove this evil completely. All political parties should also try to maintain social harmony. It is very important for the development of world biggest democracy.

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