

Role of Caste in Politics: A Study on Indian Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: *Caste played an important role in Indian politics even before independence. The word ‘Caste’ is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese word ‘CASTA’ that means race or breed or lineage. In the past times, the term was used as a racial and social identifier. One person’s caste is determined by his or her birth. It determines all the social, financial and political relations of the individual. Caste occupies a special place in a person’s life. Caste-based politics at present is particularly significant. Leaders of some political parties use it for their own selfish interests, which further aggravates the discriminatory attitude of the common man. Caste also has a special effect on different political organizations, its nature, the work of political parties and pressure groups. Caste plays a special role in the political thinking and participation of the individual. Indian society is divided by caste, religion and class which hinders India’s parliamentary democracy and national unity from working independently. The aim of this paper is to analyse the present status of politics while relate with the caste in India.*

KEY WORDS: *Caste, Class, Democracy, Participation, Politics*

Date of Submission: 18-07-2021

Date of Acceptance: 03-08-2021

I. INTRODUCTION:

Varna system or caste is a traditional feature of Indian society. The upper castes of the society, specially the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas used to play a special role in politics. Brahmin’s were known as intelligent and knowledgeable ones and they became the teachers in our society. The Kshatriyas held the position of king and the Brahmins were advisors there. Vaishyas became the traders and sudras do menial jobs in our society. The sudras did not have any political rights. One category is missing from this Varna system that of the Dalits. That is why they are as long called “avarna”. This people do not have any Varna and they are given the task of cleansing. Most of the time they were kept away from the society and they were considered as the lowest caste. Their social and political situation was very poor. The influence of this caste system did not diminish even during the British rule. The British used caste as a tool to rule India. After independence, India’s electoral process began. Every adult in the country has the right to vote. But caste has a special effect on a person’s voting behaviour. Caste has always been an essential element of Indian political infrastructure. Most political parties use caste for their own interest. Political parties use caste-based slogans to get maximum votes. Such caste-based politics further indulges the caste system. Some political leaders divide the people of the society and caste-based politics becomes their main objective. It destroys the harmony of the society and creates violence. Many times political parties select candidates on the basis of caste so that the candidate wins the election by getting a majority of votes of his caste. In a slightly different way, political parties like the Britishers use caste as a tool to win elections. Many times these political parties divide people with some bitter caste based statements. They choose their flags not on the basis of social work but on basis of caste. So that, they can get the valuable votes of the people.

II. OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To analyse the influences of caste in Indian politics.
- 2) To study the relationship between caste and politics in Indian perspective.
- 3) Finding some ways to suppress the immoral relations between caste and politics.

III. METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on secondary sources of data. The data has been collected from, government documents, census reports, different books, journals, websites etc.

ROLE OF CASTE IN INDIAN POLITICS:

1. Caste and Political Parties: Caste is used as an important element of the Indian party system. Most of political parties in India are directly or indirectly have based on caste and protect the interests of a particular caste. The influence of caste is particularly noticeable among regional political parties.

For example, DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu are Brahmin and non-Brahmin political parties. In Punjab, Akali Dal has a community identity and influenced by the issue of jats vs. non –jats. It can also be said that most of the regional political parties in Bihar were formed on the basis of caste. For example, Lok Janshakti Party, Samajwadi Party in UP is considered as Yadav Party, Bahujan Samaj Party is considered as Scheduled Caste Party and Shiv Sena Party in Maharashtra is considered as Maratha Party.

2. Caste and Socialisation: People of different castes have their own loyalties and faith in different political parties and their ideologies. From birth, a person grows up to be a member of a particular caste and bound by this caste system. Some of them are from higher castes and some from lower castes. In many cases a person's thinking is also based on his or her caste and he or she supports the group that values his or her caste interests. Thus the caste system has a special effect on socialization.

3. Caste and Election: Caste plays an important role in the electoral system of Indian politics. While nominating candidates, political parties keep in mind the caste of the candidate in a constituency and the caste of the voters in that particular constituency, so that the candidate is assured of getting votes of his caste. All these political parties use caste as a way to win elections. Candidates also make various promises before the election such as socio-economic development, poverty alleviation, good education system etc.. But after the election, political parties cannot fulfil most of their promises.

4. Caste and pressure groups: Pressure group is an organization that tries to put pressure on the government for the common interests and objectives of some people. But there are several pressure groups in India that are formed to the interests of particular castes. Caste also has a special effect on the working of the pressure group, which forces the government to work for interest of certain castes. There are a few caste based pressure groups like scheduled caste federation, Arya Samaj Sabha, Sanatan Dharam Sabha etc.

5. Caste in making government: Making public policy is a very important task of the government for good governance and betterment of the society but caste has a special influence in making various policies and programs of the government. Political parties keep caste in mind in decision making. Caste also has an effect on individual voting behaviour, political participation and party formation. The caste also plays a special role in the formation of the Council of Ministers and the appointment of various political positions in the government.

6. Caste and Indian Constitution: Before independence, some sections of Indian society were economically, socially and politically backward, such as SC, ST and OBC. They had to live on dependence and as a result they had to face various problems. Therefore, after independence, the Indian Constitution included some provisions for the development of this least advantaged groups, which provide those equal rights as well as reservation of seats for them in various fields. Article 46 directs the State to work for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to take steps to protect their interests. This will protect SCs and STs from all kinds of injustice and oppression. Article 330 provides for reservation of Lok Sabha seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Similarly, Article 332 provides for reservation of seats in every State Legislative Assembly for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes.

7. Caste and local politics: Panchayat Raj is a system of local self-government that is practiced in India. It fixes that local administration issues in rural areas should be resolved through local government through elected members. The Panchayat Raj system played a significant role in India and brought the system of governance to the people of the villages. Panchayat raj system makes the governance system of the country more effective. But this caste system has a special effect on local politics. The upper castes gaining more privileged because they are economically and politically strong and the lower castes have very less privileged than them. It can be said that this caste based political system hinders the independent functioning of the Panchayat Raj Institution.

8. Caste and violence: Although the caste system in India was removed from the law in 1950, but caste based discrimination is still present in the society. Caste-based violence is spreading in India in various ways. The nature of caste is hereditary. A person's caste is determined by his birth. This caste system has been going on historically which not only divides a person into classes, but also divides his work on the basis of caste. According to The Human Rights Watch, In India discriminatory, inhumane and degrading treatment of more than 165 million people is considered to be justified on the basis of caste. Historically marginalized classes such as SCs and SSCs have been subjected to various discriminatory and superstitious practices by the upper classes of the society. Like harassment, illegal land grabbing, forced evictions etc., which indulges in violence.

9. Caste and administration: Administration is an important part of the governance system of any country. The administration of India has not escaped the influence of caste. In many cases, special importance is given to certain castes in administrative work. Sometimes these political parties give appointments, transfer promotions etc. to the administrators on the basis of their caste. That is why in some cases the administrators have to work keeping in mind the interests of the political parties.

10. Caste based leadership: Most Indians support political party leaders of their own caste and religion. Identity politics plays an effective role in the election process. This is because most of people have mistrust in leaders outside their own community. Especially upper caste people have very little faith in leaders outside their caste.

IV. SUGGESTIONS:

1. Most important way to end this caste based politics is education. It is possible to reduce the influence of caste by spreading education in the society.
2. Political parties should stop using caste-based politics.
3. People in the society should be made aware of the negative effects of caste through various ways.
4. To stop caste-based violence, the spirit of brotherhood should be inculcated in people.
5. Children should be taught the importance of equality in family and school from an early age.
6. Political parties should nominate candidates on the basis of education and merit rather than on the basis of caste or self-interest.
7. Political parties should not spread any caste-based slogans and statements.
8. Every person in the society should vote on the basis of merit and social work of the candidate.
9. Appointment on the basis of caste in various political positions and administrative fields should be stopped.
10. Panchayat Raj Institutions should work for rural development without any distinction between upper and lower castes.

V. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, there is an interdependent relationship between both caste and politics, which has a significant impact of Indian politics. Caste is an important historical element of the Indian social system that occupies a special place in Indian politics in various ways. India is a democratic state where all individuals are given equal rights and freedoms. But caste hinders this equality of the individual. Caste divides people into high and low castes which undermines the independence of Indian democracy. India adopts a liberal democratic system which is characterized by equal rights, justice and freedom. Caste and democracy work against each other. As caste hinders the life of the individual, democracy helps to survive independently. Caste is determined by a person's birth. It is getting worse with the involvement of politics with caste. The way in which political parties use caste for their own benefit creates various grievances in the society. The caste system is one of the main reason for the division of Indian political parties. In many cases, political violence arises because different political parties are divided into different ideologies based on caste and work in the interest of their own caste. Political parties propagate their slogans and campaigns based on caste. So it can be said that caste will continue to play a special role in Indian politics if individuals vote on the basis of caste, not on the basis of work for the society of the candidates, then India will lose the true essence of democracy. Caste is only an identity mark. The person should never be considered on that basis of caste. The formation of a society with equal social rights and justice must break the blind faith in caste and bring about the development of society. Political parties should stop caste based politics and think for the development of the individual in the society. Our education system also plays a special role in ending this caste system as children should be taught equality and brotherhood from the very beginning so that this caste system is completely destroyed later. Various social agencies, schools, mass media should be given the responsibility to build a broad perspective among the people, so that the attitude of caste can be reduced. People need to be made aware of the negative effects of this traditionally practiced caste system. But the main solution to get out of caste politics is to eradicate caste. At the same time, political parties need to move beyond their narrow interests to maintain national unity and integrity.

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